

Top Sleep Tips^{zzz}

From ABC Radio Canberra's Life Guru, Sue Read. Psychologist

Healthy sleep habits

We need good sleep so our minds and bodies can replenish, regenerate and rejuvenate. 'Good sleep' involves depth, quality and duration. Generally, adults need 7-9 hours of good sleep to function well; children and adolescents need more.

Without a good night's sleep, we can wake up tired and grumpy and find it hard to regulate our emotions throughout the day. Yep, think road rage.

So what are the healthy sleep habits that can take us from restlessness to restfulness? It's all about practising good sleep hygiene. We need to tune into our body's natural sleep rhythm, get into a routine, and practice it regularly.

Importantly, we need transition time from being awake, to getting ready to fall asleep. So as the evening unfolds consider taking on my top tips.



1 GET MELLOW

Stay away from stimulants. This includes avoiding caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and other chemicals that interfere with sleep. These are all stimulants that can keep us awake.



2 TIMING AND TYPE OF FOOD

Eating a family-sized pepperoni pizza at 10 pm may be a recipe for insomnia! Aim to finish dinner several hours before bedtime and avoid foods that cause indigestion. Try sleep inducing foods like some almonds, a small serve of white rice, tuna, turkey, or bananas. Warm milk, or chamomile tea can work a treat too.



3 ESTABLISH A SMOOTHING PRE-SLEEP ROUTINE

Ease the transition from wake time to sleep time with some relaxing activities an hour or so before bed: take a bath (the rise and fall of temperature promotes drowsiness), listen to soft music, light candles. Also, leave your cares behind - don't take your problems to bed - get them out of your head and onto paper by writing them down beforehand.

Now set the scene for a good night's sleep ...



4 TURN YOUR BEDROOM INTO A SLEEP SANCTUARY

To sleep well, we need a cool, quiet, dark environment. Try using earplugs, blackout curtains, or sleep masks, and make sure you have a comfortable mattress and pillow/s. Banish all screens and devices that emit blue light (phones, laptops, TV, tablets, Ipads, kindles) – they mess with our body's ability to fall asleep. Keep the bedroom for sleep and sex!



5 GO TO BED WHEN YOU'RE TRULY TIRED

Struggling to fall asleep only leads to frustration. If you're not asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed, go to another room and do something relaxing, like reading or listening to music until you are tired enough to sleep.



6 STAY CALM AND SLEEP ON

Staring at the clock when you're trying to fall asleep or when you wake in the middle of the night, can actually increase stress, making it harder to fall asleep. Instead, practice some deep slow breathing, or think about things you're grateful for.

Other tips for a good night's sleep...



7 KEEP A CONSISTENT SLEEP SCHEDULE

Going to bed at the same time each night and waking up at the same time each day sets our body's 'internal clock' to expect sleep at a certain time, night after night. Yes, it's the power of habit.



8 NAP EARLY - OR NOT AT ALL

Take naps in the early afternoon. Generally, napping after 3pm can interfere with our night time sleep. Keeping your nap between 20 mins - 40 mins will help to avoid it interfering with your nightly sleep pattern.



9 EXERCISE EARLY

Exercise can help you fall asleep faster and sleep more soundly, as long as it's done at the right time – during the day is best. Intense exercise too close to bed time is likely to interfere with your sleeping pattern. Night time exercise like yoga, stretching and walking is likely to be better in assisting sleep.



10 ONE TIP AT A TIME

Trying lots of new habits all at once can be overwhelming, so integrate these tips into your routine one at a time, over time. Think about, what's the smallest, most practical adjustment you can fit into your life right now. Aim to implement this consistently for the next week.

Healthy sleep habits

Too often, our bedrooms resemble a combination of office, living room and multiplex cinema. Numerous studies have shown that using devices (phones, laptops, TV, tablets, Ipads, kindles) in bed before sleep, can suppress and delay the production of melatonin – the hormone we produce when it gets dark, and that tells us it's time to sleep. Suppression and delay of melatonin means we can feel super alert so instead of winding down for sleep, we take longer to go to sleep, we have shorter sleep duration, and more sleep deficiency.

Electronic devices that emit blue light can also reduce the amount of time we spend in slow-wave and REM sleep, which are vital for good cognitive functioning during the day. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to sleep problems stemming from blue light.

Top tip: keep screens out of the bedroom. I mean it, banish them from your bed! Try to stop using all screens an hour or two before bed time – instead read a book, dim the lights, get cosy, meditate, chat to your family/partner, have a bath, do some gentle yoga or stretching, listen to soft music, write in your journal, practice deep slow breathing, think about all you are grateful for ... sweet dreams.

**Hear more from Sue Read
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