

INSOMNIA

Here are a number of suggestions for improving sleep. Remember, it may take 2 to 4 weeks to see the best results.

Good Sleep Routines

- Find time for **vigorous exercise** during the day; avoid exercise for several hours before bedtime, however, because it can act as a stimulant.
- Don't **read** or **watch TV** in bed. Use your bed only for sleeping.
- Don't take **naps** during the day.
- Keep the **temperature** in your bedroom comfortable.
- **Avoid caffeine** within 6 hours of bedtime, and perhaps altogether. (Remember that many soft drinks, as well as chocolate, coffee, and tea, contain caffeine.)
- Think of sleep as **recreation**, and try not to get too upset about missed sleep. Each person's need for sleep is different. Several nights' lost sleep has been shown not to impair thinking or test-taking abilities nearly as much as most people think it would.
- **Don't count** the hours you sleep; whenever you wake up reasonably refreshed, you have had enough sleep.
- Go to bed at the **same time** each day, and get up at about the same time every morning, whether you feel you have slept well or not. Do this even on the weekends.

Suggestions for Bedtime

- Engage in quiet activities to "wind down" at the end of your day. Reading, watching TV, listening to music, meditation, prayer, or a pleasant bath or shower can help ease you into a relaxed state for sleep.
- Don't drink yourself to sleep; alcohol may make you drowsy, but the resulting sleep is not restful.
- Try "Grandmother's remedy" of warm milk. L-tryptophan, the amino acid it contains, helps people fall asleep. L-tryptophan is also available in pharmacies and health food stores; 1–2 grams taken 1 hour before bed is a natural and effective sleeping aid for many people with occasional insomnia. It is preferable to other over-the-counter medications, which may cause drowsiness but do not necessarily induce sleep.
- Don't lie in bed when you are not sleepy. If you do not fall asleep within 15 minutes, get out of bed and engage in a quiet activity such as reading, watching television, or listening to music. Go back to bed only when you feel sleepy. If you do not fall asleep within 15 minutes this time, do the same thing again. Repeat this procedure until you fall asleep promptly. Over time, this routine can break the mental association of bed with lying awake and worrying rather than falling asleep quickly.
- Try some distraction and relaxation techniques:
 - Think about a relaxing scene, or a place you find soothing.
 - Practice deep muscle relaxation exercises (tensing and then relaxing each major muscle group in your body), moving from one end of your body (for example, your feet) to the other.

- Practice the self-relaxation technique of focussing intently on a soothing word (like “calm” or “breathe”) or on breathing in and out slowly and deeply.
- Don’t take prescription sleeping pills any more often than absolutely necessary, even if your doctor prescribed them to help you sleep. Sleeping medication is only for short-term, occasional use; the drug loses its effectiveness when the body becomes accustomed to it.

If You Still Cannot Sleep

- Remember that sleep needs vary greatly from person to person.
- Remember that stress is the most common cause of insomnia. If you are pushing yourself too hard, look into ways that you can reduce and cope with the stress in your life.
- If you don’t sleep for a long period of time, or you feel tired after trying these suggestions, or you feel that emotional problems are making it impossible for you to sleep, you may want to consult an advisor, clergyman, counselor, physician, or other helping professional for assistance in sorting things out.