

Mental Health Matters

A Guide to Restful Sleep



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Sleep is vital to our health and well being. Yet millions of us are not getting enough sleep, or are suffering from other sleep problems. The following tips can help you achieve sleep and the benefits it provides.

1. Establish and maintain a regular bedtime and wake-up time. Keeping a regular sleep schedule helps to develop a sleep/wake rhythm that encourages better sleep. Get up at your established wake-up time even if you've had trouble sleeping.
2. Fill your days with activity. Time spent lying around or napping will interfere with the quality and/or quantity of nighttime sleep.
3. Establish and maintain a bedtime routine. To relax your mind and prepare yourself for a restful night you may have a light snack if desired, followed by a warm bath or shower to relax your body, relaxation techniques, and/or meditation or prayer.
4. Create a comfortable sleep environment. Reserve your bed and your bedroom for sleep. Minimize light and noise as much as possible. A fan or white noise machine may help block noise you can't control. Maintain a cool room temperature.
5. Pay attention to your habits, especially in the evening. Avoid heavy or spicy meals, large quantities of liquids, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, and nicotine.
6. If you don't fall asleep within 30 minutes of going to bed, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy.
7. If you awaken in the middle of the night avoid smoking, eating, and drinking excessive fluids.

Learn to Relax

Stress is the number one enemy of sleep. Luckily, much of the tension that disturbs sleep can be dispelled. Relaxation training helps to derail a lot of the disturbing thoughts and to unknot tight muscles that make it hard to sleep soundly. You need to experiment with different relaxation methods or combinations of methods to see what works best for you. It may take a couple of weeks to see improvement. Use these exercises consistently and you will see results.

Deep Breathing Exercise can help you to stay in control when you feel anxiety is getting the better of you, and is a good way to begin bedtime relaxation. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose for a count of 5. Hold your breath for 3-5 seconds. Breathe out through your mouth for a count of 5 pushing out all of the air.

Meditation can help calm you and clear your mind of worries. Close your eyes and concentrate on a single word, calming thought or object. Don't worry if other thoughts pop into your head, just relax and focus.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is tensing then relaxing muscle groups one at a time from head to toe until you feel relaxed.

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