

# TIPS TO SUPPORT BETTER SLEEP

## Ensuring Restorative Sleep

When we are functioning within our window of tolerance, we typically experience consistent and restorative sleep.

While there are many different reasons we can struggle with poor sleep, stress is one of the more common. When we have prolonged stressors or our stress response is consistently activated, most of us will start to experience challenges with our sleep such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, unsettling dreams or nightmares, or sleeping but not waking rested.

When the quantity or quality of sleep is impacted, we are less rested and less stable in dealing with the following day's stressors, which further increases our stress activation. It becomes a vicious cycle.

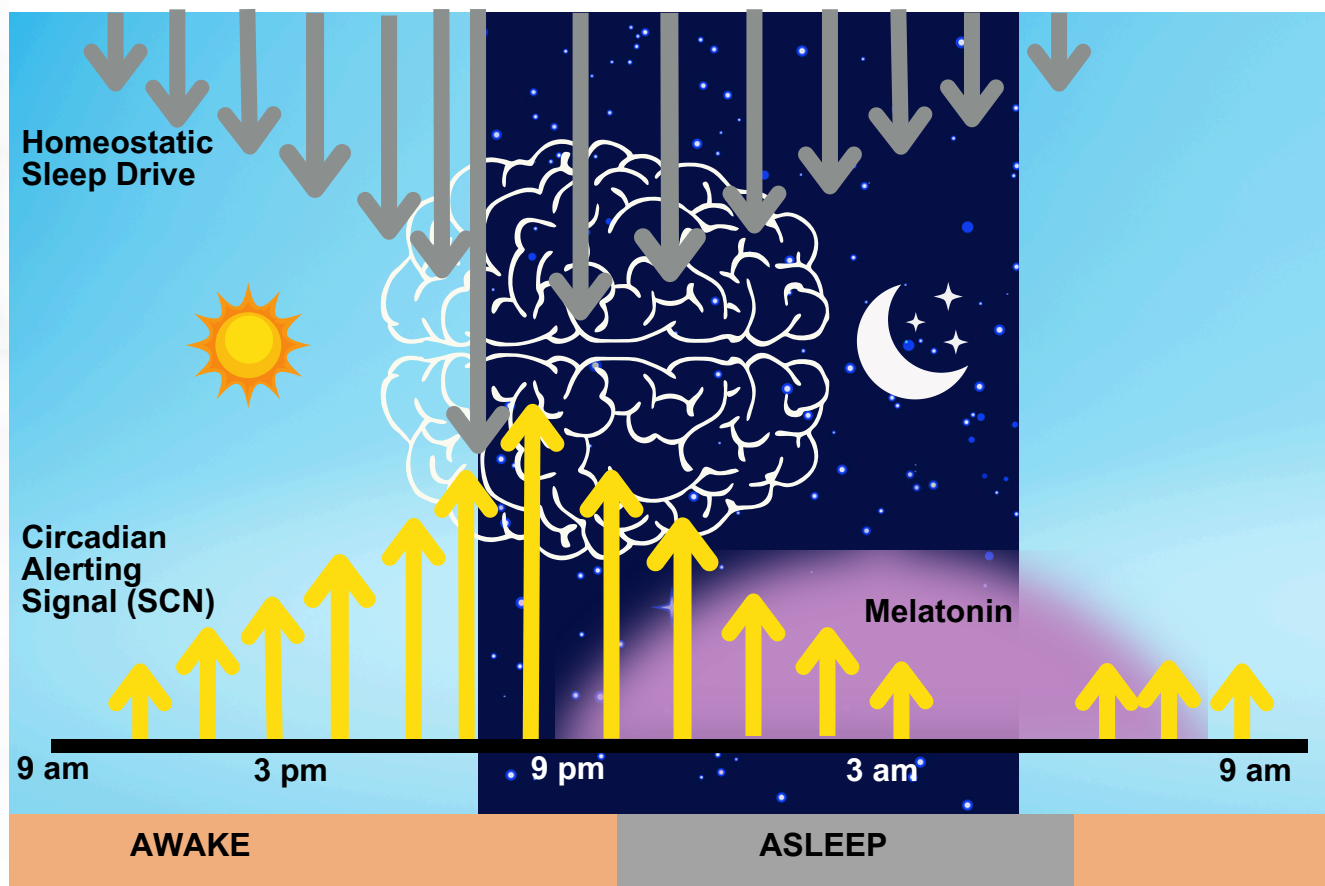
Because sleep is restorative, we want to ensure that we get consistent and adequate amounts.



## Two Process Model of Sleep

In the Two-Process Model, sleep depends on a balance between two forces: a "sleep timer" and an "internal clock." The downward gray arrows represent our sleep timer (Homeostatic Sleep Drive). Every hour we stay awake, our need for sleep builds up like a heavy weight pressing down on the brain. To keep awake and active during the day, our internal clock (Circadian Alerting Signal) sends out the yellow arrows. These arrows peak in the afternoon to fight off that sleepy feeling and keep you energized while the sun is up.

Around 9:00 PM, the timeline switches from "Awake" to "Asleep," and the diagram turns dark. At this point, your body releases melatonin, shown by the purple glowing wave. Melatonin is your body's natural sleep signal; it peaks in the middle of the night to keep you resting soundly while your "sleep timer" zeroes out and empties. By 9:00 AM, the sun is back up, the melatonin wave disappears, and the yellow energy arrows start rising again to help you wake up and tackle a new day.



ADAPTED FROM: Edgar, D.M., Dement, W.C. & Fuller, C.A. (1993). *Journal of Neuroscience*, 13, 3, 1065-1079; Gibson, L. (2023). *Trauma-Based Nightmare Treatment, PESI*; Kennaway, D.J. & Voultsios, A. (1998). *Journal of Clinical Endocrine Metabolism*, 83, 1013-1015 ; Kilduff T.S. & Kushida, C.A. (1999). *Sleep Disorders Medicine: Basic Science. Technical Considerations and Clinical Aspects.*

# Sleep Disruptors and Enhancers

## Things to **AVOID** (Sleep Disruptors):

- too much food or drink close to sleep time
- blue light from phone/computer/television screen
- caffeine and alcohol use
- stress/anxiety/worry
- certain noises/sounds
- temperature (too hot or too cold)
- lack of daytime sunlight exposure
- medications and medical conditions
- bed partners and/or pets
- inconsistent sleep schedule



## Things to **APPROACH** (Sleep Enhancers):

- limited food or drink close to sleep time
- limited blue light and screen time before bed from phone/computer/television
- wind down routine and calming activities before bed
- quiet and dark bedroom
- cool room temperature and enough bedcovers to maintain warmth
- daytime exercise
- daytime sunlight exposure
- consistent sleep schedule

# Sleep Hygiene Suggestions

## Set a Sleep Schedule

A set sleep schedule normalizes sleep as an essential part of the day. It also helps the brain and body get accustomed to getting the amount of sleep needed.

- Have a fixed wake up time regardless of whether it is a weekday or weekend, workday or non-workday.
- Make sure naps to regain energy are short and occur by early afternoon.
- No matter how tempting, don't skip sleep to work, study, socialize, or exercise.
- Have a target (anchor) bedtime and be ready for bed at that time each night.

## Ensure a Tranquil Sleep Environment

While there is individual variation, ensuring the bedroom is calm and inviting place supports good sleep.

- Have a comfortable mattress, pillow and bedding.
- Set a cooler room temperature to suit your preferences.
- Use heavy curtains or an eye mask to block out light.
- If needed, use ear plugs, a fan, a white noise machine or other tranquil sounds to drown out bothersome sounds.

## Use a Bedtime Routine

A pre-sleep routine can help you relax and make it easier to fall asleep.

- Be consistent in following the same steps each night e.g., putting on your pajamas and brushing your teeth.
- Unplug from electronics for 30-60 minutes pre-bed. Cell phones, tablets, and laptops cause mental stimulation and also generate blue light that may decrease melatonin production.
- Proactively wind down 30 minutes before sleep with activities that create a state of calm e.g., quiet music, light stretching, reading, paced breathing, mindfulness and/or relaxation exercises.

## Separate Bedroom from Non-Bedroom Activities

- To keep a healthy association between the bedroom and sleep (as well as sexual intimacy) ensure that other non-relaxing activities, such as computer work and television watching, occur in other parts of the home.

### **Steer Clear of Consumption Habits that Impact Sleep**

- As caffeine is a stimulant it's important to avoid it in the afternoon and evening.
- Avoid big meals and stick to lighter snacks before bed to ensure that your body is not still heavily digesting instead of relaxing when it is time for sleep.
- Reduce or eliminate nicotine as it stimulates the body and disrupts sleep.
- Avoid or limit alcohol, especially later in the evening. It may seem to make falling asleep easier, but as the effect wears off, it disrupts sleep later in the night.

### **Breathing**

When under stress, our breathing tends to become shallow without us even noticing, which is contrary to relaxing.

- Take some time to deliberately restore healthy breathing.
- Breathing should be slow and steady.
- The intake should be through the nose and deep enough that it reaches and fills your belly. When you place your hands on the sides of your rib cage you should feel some expansion.
- The outbreath should be equal to or longer than the inbreath in duration and should be through the mouth.

### **Keep Healthy Daytime Habits**

- Get some Daylight/Sunlight. It will provide some brightness and will help with circadian rhythms that can encourage quality sleep.
- Maintain Regular Physical Exercise. It's good for muscles, stimulates the heart, activates the brain and helps us feel stronger. It also makes sleep easier.
- Get plenty of water but not in the hour or two immediately before bed.
- Stretch. We all carry our stress in our bodies e.g., lower back, neck, shoulders. Use stretches to target relaxation in these areas.

### **Empty Your Mind**

When our minds are filled with thoughts, we need to be active in emptying them so that sleep is possible.

- Talk through challenging things well before bedtime.
- Put worries in a worry jar—write each worry on a slip of paper and put them in the box or jar, releasing it from your mind as you do.
- Write out the idea or to do list that is circulating in your mind.
- Journal about unresolved feelings.

### **Aim for Relaxation, not Getting to Sleep**

When we are focused on getting to sleep, we are striving rather than allowing it to occur through relaxation.

- Change your body states. Imagine your body as stiff and rigid as uncooked spaghetti then slowly shift it to a state of limp, floppy cooked spaghetti.
- Move your focus to your body and just notice the different sensations one at a time starting with your feet and moving up to your head.
- Recall five calm and happy experiences from different parts of your life and replay them slowly and effortlessly in your mind.

### **Don't Toss and Turn**

In the long term it is helpful to have a healthy association between being in bed and sleeping. So, if after 20 minutes you have not gotten to sleep:

- Do not repeatedly look at the clock.
- Get up and do something calming e.g., read, lightly stretch, listen to relaxing music.
- Do a self-regulation activity to settle your nervous system e.g., meditation, slow breathing exercises.



# Sleep Tips for Other Specific Issues

## Sleep Tips Related To Stress

- Stop working and stimulating activities 90 minutes before bedtime.
- Develop a wind down routine for transitioning from daytime concerns to restfulness.
- Start winding down at least one hour before bed, include active relaxation: bath/shower, meditation, guided imagery, slow music with 60 beats per minute (or less).
- Mitigate nighttime worrying, planning, and ruminating using mindfulness-based stress reduction. e.g., body scan, mindful breathing, guided meditation.
- Consider Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia.

## Sleep Tips Related To Sleep Fragmentation

- Adequate daytime hydration.
- Get some mid-late afternoon sunlight.
- Physical activity/exercise in mid-late afternoon.
- Avoid evening diuretic beverages (alcohol, caffeine)
- Ensure comfortable bed, warm bedding, cool room temperature.
- Ensure dark bedroom and avoid turning on lights if you wake up.
- Keep a bedside glass of cool water.
- Allow bedroom temperature to cool gradually throughout the night.
- Eliminate nighttime worrying, planning, and ruminating using mindfulness based stress reduction. e.g., body scan, mindful breathing, guided meditation.
- Consider Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia/sleep anxiety.



### **Sleep Tips Related To Delayed Sleep Onset**

- Maintain bedroom environment only for sleep and sex.
- Minimize noise and lights in bedroom.
- Get exposure to first morning light for at least an hour.
- Physical activity/exercise in the morning (preferably near a window or outdoors).
- Decrease light at night especially compact fluorescent lights and LED backlight screens.
- Shift carbohydrates from evening to breakfast.
- Reduce/eliminate nighttime caffeine, alcohol, and high sodium foods.
- Start winding down at least one hour before bed, include active relaxation: bath/shower, meditation, guided imagery, music with 60 beats per minute (or less).
- Ensure that extremities (hands and feet) are warm.

### **Sleep Tips Related To Awakening Too Early**

- Shift breakfast and any caffeinated beverages to 45 minutes after ideal wakeup time.
- Avoid bright lights, eating, and caffeine until 30 minutes after ideal wake-up time.
- Increase late afternoon and evening sunlight. (opposite of what larks tend toward).
- Increase evening physical activity.
- Shift carbohydrates from breakfast to dinner.
- Minimize noise and lights in bedroom.
- Assure sufficient bedcovers to be warm in early morning (assess skin temperature at waking).



**If you consistently struggle with poor quality sleep and have tried many changes such as those in this booklet to improve your sleep hygiene without improvement, you may want to consult a Physician or Sleep Specialist.**

## **Sources**

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