

# An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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## Healthy Sleep Tips

The following ten tips can help you achieve sleep and the benefits it provides. These tips are intended for "typical" adults, but not necessarily for children or persons experiencing medical problems.

You can find information on this site about children and sleep and NSF recommends that persons treated for medical conditions consult their doctor – check our resource, "Sleep Talk with Your Doctor.", ([www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org))

Finally, if you have trouble falling asleep, maintaining sleep, awaken earlier than you wish, feel un-refreshed after sleep or suffer from excessive sleepiness during the day or when you wish to be alert, you should also consult your physician. Be sure to tell him/her if you have already tried these tips and for how long. To check for possible sleep problems, go to our checklist, "How's Your Sleep?"

**1. Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule including weekends.**

Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in our brain and the body's need to balance both sleep time and wake time. A regular waking time in the morning strengthens the circadian function and can help with sleep onset at night. That is also why it is important to keep a regular bedtime and wake-time, even on the weekends when there is the temptation to sleep-in.

**2. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as soaking on a hot bath or hot tub and then reading a book or listening to soothing music.**

A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime conducted away from bright lights helps separate your sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress or anxiety which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep or remain asleep. Avoid arousing activities before bedtime like working, paying bills, engaging in competitive games or family problem-solving. Some studies suggest that soaking in hot water (such as a hot tub or bath) before retiring to bed can ease the transition into deeper sleep, but it should be done early enough that you are no longer sweating or over-heated. If you are unable to avoid tension and stress, it may be helpful to learn relaxation therapy from a trained professional. Finally, avoid exposure to bright before bedtime because it signals the neurons that help control the sleep-wake cycle that it is time to awaken, not to sleep.

**3. Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable & cool**

Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep – cool, quiet, dark, comfortable and free of interruptions. Also make your bedroom reflective of the value you place on sleep. Check your room for noise or other distractions, including a bed partner's sleep disruptions such as snoring, light, and a dry or hot environment. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise," humidifiers, fans and other devices.

**4. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows**

Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. The one you have been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy – about 9 or 10 years for most good quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep but also free of allergens that might affect you and objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

**5. Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.**

It is best to take work materials, computers and televisions out of the sleeping environment. Use your bed only for sleep and sex to strengthen the association between bed and sleep. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine. For example, if looking at a bedroom clock makes you anxious about how much time you have before you must get up; move the clock out of sight. Do not engage in activities that cause you anxiety and prevent you from sleeping.

**6. Finish eating at least 2 – 3 hours before your regular bedtime.**

Eating or drinking too much may make you less comfortable when settling down for bed. It is best to avoid a heavy meal too close to bedtime. Also, spicy foods may cause heartburn, which leads to difficulty falling asleep and discomfort during the night. Try to restrict fluids close to bedtime to prevent night time awakenings to go to the bathroom, though some people find milk or herbal, non-caffeinated teas to be soothing and a helpful part of a bedtime routine.

**7. Exercise regularly. It is best to complete your workout at least a few hours before bedtime.**

In general, exercising regularly makes it easier to fall asleep and contributes to sounder sleep. However, exercising sporadically or right before going to bed will make falling asleep more difficult. In addition to making us more alert, our body temperature rises during exercise, and takes as much as 6 hours to begin to drop. A cooler body temperature is associated with sleep onset... Finish your exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime. Late afternoon exercise is the perfect way to help you fall asleep at night.

**8. Avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, and soft drinks, chocolate) close to bedtime. It can keep you awake.**

Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it can produce an alerting effect. Caffeine products, such as coffee, tea, colas and chocolate, remain in the body on average from 3 to 5 hours, but they can affect some people up to 12 hours later. Even if you do not think caffeine affects you, it may be disrupting and changing the quality of your sleep. Avoiding caffeine within 6-8 hours of going to bed can help improve sleep quality.

**9. Avoid nicotine (e.g. cigarettes, tobacco products). Used close to bedtime, it can lead to poor sleep**

Nicotine is also a stimulant. Smoking before bed makes it more difficult to fall asleep. When smokers go to sleep, they experience withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, which also cause sleep problems. Nicotine can cause difficulty falling asleep, problems waking in the morning, and may also cause nightmares. Difficulty sleeping is just one more reason to quit smoking. And never smoke in bed or when sleepy!

#### 10. Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.

Although many people think of alcohol as a sedative, it actually disrupts sleep, causing night time awakenings. Consuming alcohol leads to a night of less restful sleep.

#### If you have sleep problems...

Use a sleep diary and talk to your doctor. Note what type of sleep problem is affecting your sleep or if you are sleepy when you wish to be awake and alert. Try these tips and record your sleep and sleep-related activities in a sleep diary. If problems continue, discuss the sleep diary with your doctor. There may be an underlying cause and you will want to be properly diagnosed. Your doctor will help treat the problem or may refer you to a sleep specialist.

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### Time Management Expert Says "Take Time for Sleep!"

By Jan Yager, Ph.D.

I come to this issue with multiple perspectives, having worked in time management since the early 1980s, as the co-author of two books about sleep, and from my own life experiences.

For my second time management book, *Creative Time Management for the New Millennium*, I surveyed 234 men and women. I discovered that Time Waster #1 is not procrastination—it's trying to do too much at once.

That often leads to finishing the day without having done the priority work that needed to be done. We all have multiple demands on our time. Very few people have the luxury of having only one thing to do. Most people are trying to do many projects at once, and with the downturn in the economy, they are trying to do many projects with fewer resources.

We have an epidemic of "distractionitis." I suggest that you write down what you need to do the next day before bedtime. You may find it enables you to go to sleep more quickly. Having a plan for the next day will replace the feeling of free-floating anxiety about the multiple demands on your time. Consider it a shopping list for your work time. Take control of your life by:

- prioritizing your goals
- planning your day
- and staying focused on what key tasks you need to do

"Workaholism" is usually a sign of poor time management. It takes a toll on your work and your social life. We need to change the attitude that workaholics are more productive than the rest of us. Working around the clock can become addictive, robbing us of time we should spend with family and friends—or just with ourselves. Some people are workaholics because they're avoiding relationships with others. They also tend to drive the people around them to an unrealistic view of what is really important in life. They are letting their work be the controlling force in their lives, rather than being in control of both work and personal/ relationship time.

Bragging about not needing a lot of sleep seems to have become the new status symbol for getting more out of your day. Unfortunately, you're creating a false and possibly counterproductive and unrealistic standard by which you're judging yourself and asking others to judge you. What's important is the number of hours of sleep you get and that it is the right amount for you, but also what you are doing with your waking hours so that you are productive and getting enough done. That will help you get the sleep you need and enjoy sleeping more without guilt.

Getting enough sleep is important for your physical and mental health and even for creativity—for example, my novel, *Just Your Everyday People*, (co-authored with Fred Yager) actually began as a dream that I wrote down upon awakening!

Jan Yager, Ph.D. is a sociologist, relationships and work expert, speaker, and author of 22 books including two books on time management: *Creative Time Management* (Prentice Hall, 1984) and *Creative Time Management for the New Millennium* (Hannacroix Creek Books, Inc., 1999). She is also co-author with Michael J. Thorpy, M.D. of *Sleeping Well: The Sourcebook for Sleep and Sleep Disorders* (Checkmark Books, 2001), and *The Encyclopaedia of Sleep and Sleep Disorders, 2nd edition* (Facts on File, Inc., 2001). Her Web site is <http://www.janyager.com>.

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#### Parenting Corner

##### Helping Children Cope with Trauma

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/>

A web site designed for parents whose child has experienced a Pediatric injury.

**Search:** Brain & Relationships: Helping Children Heal

**Search:** Six Core Strengths for Healthy Child Development: An Overview

#### Benefits of EMDR

**A series of video stores about the value and benefits of EMDR can be found by googling "scoopit" then "EMDR"**

#### \*\*\*Net News\*\*\*

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful:

**Search:** Jon Kabat-Zinn: Coming to Our Senses

**Search:** Mapping Emotions On The Body: Love Makes Us Warm All Over

**Search:** How Your Brain Can Turn Anxiety into Calmness

#### Self-Help Corner:

City of Edmonton Community Resources: 211

Support Network / Distress Line: 780-482-HELP

Kids Help Line: 1-800-668-6868