

My Sleep Stinks: The Importance of Sleep Hygiene

February 2015

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HAVING TROUBLE GETTING TOO OR STAYING ASLEEP?

Has your GP or someone else suggested you improve your sleep hygiene & you thought “huh, what the heck is that?”

Basically sleep hygiene is good sleep habits. It involves behavioural & environmental practices that encourage sleep.

ENVIRONMENT

Temperature: Consider the temperature of your bedroom & use appropriate bedding & sleep wear for the season

Lighting: Ensure that the room is sufficiently dark for sleep. Consider blackout curtains or a sleep mask

Clock: Remove clocks to prevent clock watching

Cleanliness: Make sure your room is free of dust & allergens; you don't want to be sneezing all night! Keep your furry children (cat, dog or guinea pig) out of the bed. After all when they stir so do you

Noise: Ensure your room is quiet & if need be consider ear plugs

Comfort: Purchase a mattress & pillows that are conducive to sleep (hard as a rock or soft as a marshmallow won't do)

BEHAVIOURS

Bed is for sleep & intimacy only: Avoid eating, drinking, the telephone, TV, & using electronic devices in bed, otherwise these activities become associated with bed

Eating: Maintain a healthy balanced diet & avoid eating heavy meals close to bedtime

No napping: Avoid napping during the day

Exercise: Exercise regularly but avoid doing this near bed time. A morning stroll is always a good way to kick start the day

Establish a bedtime routine: Your body needs time to unwind, establish a set bedtime routine (e.g., 1hr before bed turn off electronics, shower, put on PJ's & do a relaxing activity)

Relaxing activities: Take a warm bath, read a book, try breathing, visualisation or relaxation exercises before bed

Avoid caffeine, other stimulants & drugs: Avoid drinks that contain caffeine (e.g., tea, coffee, fizzy & energy drinks). Instead consider milk which contains natural sleep inducers. Avoid cigarettes which are stimulants as they interfere with sleep. Avoid alcohol it impacts quality of sleep

Bedtime & rise time: Aim to go to bed at the same time, but if you are not tired wait to go to bed (otherwise you will only reinforce bad habits such as lying in bed awake), however, get up at the same time each morning (yip on weekends too) regardless of the amount of sleep you had. This will allow you to 'set your body clock'.

Morning sunshine: When you wake open your curtains or step outside & expose yourself to light. This will help 'set your body clock'

Worry wart? Instead of lying in bed worrying, schedule 30mins 'worry time' well before bed. Some people also find having a worry diary to jot down worries throughout the day & postponing 'worrying' about them until the designated time, helpful.

Still can't sleep? If you are not asleep within 20minutes of getting into bed, get up & do something unstimulating before trying to sleep again. Don't try sleep on the couch, or in another bed, unless that's where you wish to sleep every night as that place will become associated with sleep!

