What is sleep hygiene?

Sleep Health

Sleep hygiene is all the buzz when it comes to improving your sleep. But what is sleep hygiene? Sleep hygiene is simply optimizing your environment and daily habits for better sleep. Some quick ways to improve sleep hygiene include:

Prioritize your sleep to get the full amount of sleep you need each night.

- This includes having a set sleep schedule. Schedule a fixed sleep time and wake-up time each day, including weekends, to keep your sleep consistent and to get into a rhythm.
- Don't overdo it with naps. Keep them short. Ten to 20 minutes is optimal, and early afternoon is best.

Keep a consistent sleep routine.

- Being consistent with your sleep routine can reinforce in your mind that it is time for sleep. Take the same steps of getting your pajamas on, brushing your teeth, etc.
- Budget time in your sleep routine to wind down at night. This will help relax and calm your state of mind.
- Dim lights during your routine. Bright lights can hinder crucial melatonin production, which induces sleep.
- Turn off electronics early. Allow an hour of time before bed without stimulation from electronics.
- Include calming activities like meditation, soft music, journaling, or practicing mindfulness as part of your sleep routine.

Optimize your sleep environment to exude tranquillity.

- Invest in a good mattress and pillow that meets your needs.
- Check your thermostat. Optimal temperature for adults to sleep at is 60-67 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Block out all lights. Unplug devices with LED lights and consider blackout curtains or an eye mask.
- Drown out noise with a fan, ear plugs, or a white noise machine.
- Keep a clean environment and use calming scents, like lavender.

Cultivate daily healthy habits.

- Get outside for a daily dose of natural sunlight to help activate your circadian rhythm.
- Exercise regularly.
- Avoid stimulants like caffeine and tobacco.
- Finish dinner earlier and minimize alcohol to allow plenty of time to digest your food before sleeping.

Foods for healthy sleep

While there are no magic sleep-inducing foods that immediately cause drowsiness, research shows that the foods below may help:

Lean protein
Lean proteins like cheese, chicken, turkey, and fish are high in the amino acid tryptophan, which tends to increase serotonin levels. Tryptophan can also be found in egg whites, soybeans, and pumpkin seeds.

Heart-healthy fats
Unsaturated fats boost heart health and serotonin levels. Examples include peanut butter and nuts such as walnuts, almonds, cashews, and pistachios.

Foods high in magnesium
Magnesium is associated with better quality of sleep. When selecting your dinner vegetable, try adding a magnesium-rich leafy green like spinach. Nuts, seeds, avocados, and black beans are also full of this nutrient.

Calming beverages
A soothing beverage to drink before bedtime would be warm milk or herbal tea such as chamomile or peppermint. Do not drink caffeine past 2 p.m.

Fresh herbs
Sage and basil may reduce tension and promote sleep. Avoid herbs such as red pepper or black pepper at night, as they have a stimulating effect.

Sources: MayoClinic.org, SleepFoundation.org

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Tips for better sleep

Do you have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, or has daylight saving time interfered with your sleep? If so, you are not alone. There are many things that can interfere with good sleep. Sleep is important because it helps boost immunity to fight illness, and it is necessary for optimal brain function. Furthermore, chronic sleep deprivation is linked to many conditions like diabetes, depression, and obesity. So how much sleep does a person need? Most adults 18 – 64 years of age need seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

If your sleep falls short, consider the following:

- Dim lights early and turn off all electronics a minimum of one hour before sleep time.

- Make sure you are comfortable. Try a leg or neck pillow to minimize any pain.

- Reduce allergens in your environment with regular cleaning, and seal your mattress with an airtight plastic cover.

- Save your bed for sleep only. Refrain from working or watching TV in bed.

- Get outside early every day to help set your circadian rhythm.

- Finish vigorous exercise three hours before sleep time.

- Stop drinking fluids two hours prior to sleep to prevent nighttime trips to the bathroom.

- Use caution with sleep aids. Many are habit-forming and only a temporary solution. Most aids are not intended for use longer than two weeks, and they often interact with medical conditions.

Most importantly, try to reduce stress in your life. If your to-do list is keeping you up at night with racing thoughts, get up and jot it all down. Make a list of all the things going through your mind. This will free up your brain and allow you to relax and rest. Talk with your primary care provide about sleep concerns, especially if you are sleepless for more than a month. Your provider can also evaluate your medications to make sure none are interfering with your sleep.

Sources: WebMD.com, MayoClinic.org, CDC.gov

Additional resources

Watch this video to learn about the four stages of sleep.

Use this sleep calculator. to help you determine a personalized sleep schedule.

Try this guided meditation to relax your body and mind.

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Positive sleep environment checklist

Are you ready to prepare yourself for better sleep? Use the checklist below to ensure you are doing everything you can to prepare your room and your mind for sleep. Use the notes section for personal reminders or helpful tips that you want to consider next time you get ready for bed.

Activity	✓	Notes
Set a reminder to turn off electronics one hour before bed.		
Declutter and clean your sleeping area.		
Set the thermostat between 60 - 67 degrees Fahrenheit.		
Make your bed with clean sheets and covers.		
Dim the lights while you engage in a relaxing bedtime routine.		
Use a pleasant aroma designated for sleep.		
When you're ready, turn the lights off. Use blackout curtains or a sleep mask, if necessary.		