

Healthy Sleep Habits

- 1. Use your bed only for sleeping.** This means you shouldn't watch TV, talk on the phone, use your computer, eat, and do other things that require you to be awake. (Sex is an exception to this rule.) By limiting your in-bed activities to sleep, you train yourself to expect to sleep when you're in bed.
- 2. In a similar vein, don't stay in bed for a long period of time if you're having trouble sleeping.** Ten to 15 minutes is a good rule of thumb, but try to rely on just knowing if you're feeling sleepy or not rather than watching the clock (see below). Being in bed and unable to fall asleep is likely to make you frustrated about not being able to sleep, which just makes it harder to fall asleep. Rather than lying in bed awake it's generally better to go to another room and do something relaxing like watching TV or reading until you start to feel like you could fall asleep easily.
- 3. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.** Even if you have a hard time falling asleep it's generally best to get up at your standard time in the morning. In the same way, avoid going to bed much earlier than your normal bedtime. Over time these habits will help to stabilize your sleep schedule.
- 4. As much as possible, do not take naps.** They tend to interfere with your ability to sleep well at night.
- 5. Avoid caffeine** in the afternoon and evening, especially if you're sensitive to its effects. **Alcohol** also tends to decrease the quality of sleep, even if it may make it easier to fall asleep.
- 6. Avoid watching the clock** when trying to fall asleep, which typically only leads to worrying about not falling asleep. Some people find that they need to turn the clock so they can't see it at night, or to remove clocks that are easily visible in the dark.
- 7. Eliminate as much as possible any factors that might disrupt your sleep**—for example, fluid intake close to bedtime that causes trips to the bathroom; indigestion from eating too much close to bed; hunger from not eating enough in the evening; frequent awakenings caused by pets; and so forth.
- 8. Try not to panic** when having a bad night's sleep. Most of us tend to “catastrophize” when we struggle to fall asleep or have our sleep interrupted, telling ourselves things like “I'll be a complete wreck tomorrow!” In reality most of these fears are overblown, and only serve to increase our anxiety about falling asleep, thus further interfering with sound sleep.

Most of these guidelines are closely adapted from a [treatment manual](#) by Jack D. Edinger, PhD, and have been helpful to many people. If you require help for a chronic sleep problem, please consult with a medical or mental health professional.