

# Better Sleep, Better Health

## Improve your sleep tonight

In our fast-paced and busy lives, trouble falling asleep and staying asleep are two of the most common health concerns that seem to affect men, women, and even children of all ages. Good rest and adequate sleep are vital for good health. During sleep the body can truly relax, restore and regenerate in ways that are just not possible while we are awake. Sleep is now recognised as one of the best ways to reduce systemic inflammation, a key driver of many health issues.

### Quick tips for better sleep tonight

Achieving better sleep is a great step toward improving specific health concerns, as well as overall health and vitality. The list below details some helpful solutions; feel free to pick and choose those that feel right for you.

- Avoid alcohol (wine, beer, and hard liquor) within 3 hours of bedtime.
  - Avoid caffeine-containing beverages or foods after 2pm. If sensitive to caffeine, avoid it after 12 noon.
    - Common caffeine-containing items: Pepsi, Coke, black tea, coffee, chai, and chocolate; coffee-containing ice creams or desserts. Be sure to read labels if you're unsure.
  - Avoid Sudafed or other decongestant cold medicines at night before bed; the active ingredient can stimulate the nervous system.
  - Some medications may have stimulating effects. Consult your pharmacist and doctor to determine whether any of them might be contributing to sleep problems. Do not discontinue any medications without permission from your doctor.
  - Complete any vigorous, aerobic exercise before 6 pm (or at least 3 hours before bedtime).
  - Try to avoid anxiety-provoking activities close to bedtime:
    - Arguments or difficult conversations,
    - Paying bills/checking the stock market,
    - Watching the news.
  - Try to avoid becoming frustrated that you are unable to fall asleep. Instead, use positive self-talk phrases regarding your ability to relax and fall asleep, i.e. "I can fall asleep." "I can relax." "Any amount of sleep I get will be fine."
  - If you are experiencing a busy mind and disturbing thoughts, try writing them in a journal to release them from your mind.
    - If this doesn't work and you find yourself consumed with worry and negative thoughts, you might consider seeking professional assistance through counselling.
  - Mindfulness and meditation are two strategies that can assist with relaxation and subsequent sleep. There are many online resources, books and DVDs available.
  - Make sleep a priority by putting it into your schedule. Plan for 8-9 hours in bed, whether you're asleep or not.
- As far as possible, try to wake up and go to bed at the same time each day, even on weekends. This assists with the proper establishment of circadian rhythms to train your biological clock.
  - Make sure you're in bed before midnight; earlier sleep is more restorative.
  - Avoid late afternoon or evening naps.
  - Avoid naps longer than 45 minutes unless you are sick or quite sleep deprived.
  - Avoid large meals and/or spicy foods before bed in order to reduce the burden on your digestive system.
  - Finish all eating 3 hours prior to going to sleep and reduce your fluid intake.
  - Try taking a warm bath – raising body temperature before bed helps induce sleep. A warm bath also relaxes muscles and reduces tension.
    - Add 1-2 cups Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate absorbed through the skin is very relaxing), to 1 cup baking soda (sodium bicarbonate which is alkalizing to a stressed out acidic body) and 10 drops lavender oil (helps lower cortisol levels).



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- Consider reading a good neutral book under low light to help with falling asleep.
- Don't stay in bed more than 20-30 minutes trying to fall asleep. Leave your bedroom and go to a relaxing room other than the bedroom and read or do a relaxation technique (e.g., meditation).
- Try using an eye mask if you are particularly sensitive to light.
- Turn off all lights in the house 30 minutes before you intend to go to bed. This allows the brain to begin relaxing and notice that it is no longer time to be awake.
- Decrease irritating noises in your space by closing windows, using ear plugs, or using white noise recordings.
- Turn off or remove any appliances or clocks that make noise.
- Remove your mobile phone from the bedroom.
- Make sure your sleeping area is a comfortable temperature (not too hot or too cold).
- Consider replacing your pillows with hypoallergenic pillows. Use ultra-fine allergy pillow and mattress covers.
- Consider using a body pillow to hug and put between your knees to align your back and shoulders at night.
- Establish an evening herbal tea habit, such as lemon balm and passion flower, to support relaxation and sleep onset.
- Naturopathic medicine can offer some excellent, personalised solutions for sleep disturbance. See your preferred practitioner for assistance.



### Helpful apps

Although it is not recommended to keep your phone beside you whilst trying to sleep, there are some apps that can be helpful for relaxation and setting good sleep patterns:

- Pzizz
- Headspace
- Smiling Mind
- Sleep Stream
- Calm

