

SLEEP HYGEINE HANDOUT

1. Ensure adequate time in bed, free from interruptions and demands.

Most adults require 7.5-8 hours. Teenagers and children require even more sleep!

The same applies to night shift workers! They may feel guilty if they do not get up after four hours to run errands, to do tasks around the house, or to let a repairman come in to fix something in the home. But...what would be the response if that same repairman were to insist that a day shift worker get up to let him in at 2 a.m.? Night shift work should not deprive one of basic rights and human necessities.

2. Keep regular sleep habits!

Regularity makes a tremendous difference. Erratic sleep habits prevent training of the "biological clocks" in our brains that help control our alertness and ability to sleep.

3. Avoid going to bed after midnight unless you work night shift.

Many people seem to 'get their second wind' after midnight. They will then have more difficulty falling asleep.

4. Go to bed prepared to sleep!

Avoid vigorous exercise shortly before retiring. It may impede your ability to fall asleep. At the same time, exercise at least several hours before retiring has been shown to be helpful.

Avoid late afternoon/evening naps, and do not allow yourself to doze off while reading or watching television prior to bedtime. Even brief episodes of sleep may interfere with subsequent sleep.

Do not allow yourself to lie in bed worrying about problems or challenges of the upcoming day. If necessary, set aside a 'worry time' some hours before bedtime and tell yourself that any difficulties you cannot resolve during that allotted time can be put on until the next day.

In most cases, the bed should be used for sleep and sex--and not for reading of interesting materials, watching television, working on a laptop, or other activities that may keep one awake. Learn to associate your bed with relaxation and not with activities that will be likely to keep you alert for prolonged periods.

Avoid large meals and excessive fluid intake that may provoke poor sleep, indigestion, heartburn or frequent awakenings to urinate. Any bedtime snacks should be small and consist of non-spicy foods with sedating potential. Examples include peanut butter and dairy products (both are high in tryptophan, an amino acid and "building block of

proteins" that tends to increase sleepiness). Many patients also report that apples taken before bedtime increase their sleepiness and ability to doze off promptly.

Caffeine and smoking prior to retiring are additional factors that can worsen one's ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Warm baths (not showers) prior to bedtime truly can prove helpful!--as can engaging in relaxing, calming and soothing activities.

Tranquil music composed for sleep induction, waterfalls and light/sound/aromatherapy units often are used effectively to facilitate dozing off into natural sleep.

5. Make sure that your bedroom is conducive to good sleep!

Ensure a dark environment, unless you are reassured by having a night light in the room. Night shift workers may benefit from use of special curtains and liners that block out light from the outside.

Ensure a quiet environment--or, if it works better for you, a soft, low-level noise such as a fan. Use measures to block out outside sounds, or utilize either white noise generators or earplugs that are "waxy" and capable of being molded to fit the ear canal. If necessary and feasible, especially for night shift workers, utilize an answering machine and unplug the telephone in the bedroom.

Ensure a reasonably cool environment. Overly warm bedrooms are not conducive to quality sleep.

Ensure a comfortable environment. Be sure that your mattress is adequately firm and comfortable.

If you have allergies to dust, dust mites, and other common features of a typical bedroom, take steps to create a relatively allergen-free bedroom. Frequently helpful measures include replacement of old pillows and carpeting, cleaning of ductwork and furnace filters, use of a HEPA filter/air conditioning and keeping pets out of the bedroom if possible and appropriate.

6. Don't sleep too long!

Avoid oversleeping and lying in the bed for prolonged periods after your sleep is completed. Excessive sleep tends to be fragmented and un-refreshing sleep that leaves people feeling worse- and that may then interfere with the following night of sleep. Some individuals require nine hours of sleep, but in adults, longer requirements in the absence of illnesses are unusual. Naps may be beneficial--but for people on a normal day schedule, they are best taken in the early afternoon, and in most cases, should be restricted to less than one hour.