

Sleep Hygiene Guidelines

Good dental hygiene is important in determining the health of your teeth and gums. Similarly, good sleep hygiene is important in determining the quality and quantity of your sleep. Review the below guidelines and check the ones you think you might be breaking.

Screen time: Turn off TV, computers, tablets, and smart phones 1 hour Before Bedtime

- The short waves of blue light (emitted from the screens of TVs, laptops, iPads, smart phones, etc.) mimic daylight. Thinking it's daytime, your brain suppresses melatonin and becomes more alert because we have evolved to see this type of light only during the day. What's more, the overall stimulation we get from these devices serves to keep us more alert. If TV is your relaxing activity, try to move it up a bit earlier in the evening.

Caffeine: Avoid Caffeine 6-8 Hours Before Bedtime

- Caffeine disturbs sleep, even in people who don't think they experience a stimulation effect.
- Individuals with insomnia are often more sensitive to mild stimulants than are normal sleepers.
- Caffeine is found in items such as coffee, tea, soda, chocolate, and many over-the-counter medications (e.g., Excedrin)
- *Caffeine should be avoided in the afternoon and evening, preferably by 1pm. You might consider a trial period of no caffeine at all.*

Nicotine: Avoid Nicotine Before Bedtime

- Although some smokers claim that smoking helps them relax, nicotine is a stimulant.
- The initial relaxing effects occur with the initial entry of the nicotine, but as the nicotine builds in the system it produces an effect similar to caffeine.
- *Nicotine should be avoided near bedtime and during the night. Don't smoke to get yourself back to sleep.*

Alcohol: Avoid Alcohol After Dinner

- Alcohol often promotes the onset of sleep, but as alcohol is metabolized sleep becomes disturbed and fragmented, leading to poor sleep quality.
- *Limit alcohol use to (1 beer or glass of wine for women, 2 for men).*

Sleeping Pills: Sleep Medications are Effective Only Temporarily

- Research has shown that sleep meds lose their effectiveness in about 2 - 4 weeks when taken regularly.
- Over time, sleeping pills actually can make sleep problems worse. When sleeping pills have been used for a long period, withdrawal from the medication can lead to an insomnia rebound. Thus, after long-term use, many individuals incorrectly conclude that they "need" sleeping pills in order to sleep normally.
- *Keep use of sleep meds infrequent, but don't worry if you need to use one on an occasional basis. (And always consult with your doctor first if you decide to make changes to your medication regimen.)*

Regular Exercise

- Exercise has been shown to aid sleep, although the positive effect often takes several weeks to become noticeable.
- Exercise within 2 hours of bedtime may elevate nervous system activity and interfere with sleep onset.
- *Get regular exercise, preferably at least 20 minutes each day of an activity that causes sweating.*