

Tips for Healthy Sleep, by David A. Buczek, MA

Developing a plan for better sleep and making sleep a priority will help you feel better, sharper, happier and healthier. All of us need about eight hours of sleep each night. Some of us may need more and some of us can get by on a bit less. These tips can help you develop a plan to get the amount you need to wake up Fully Charged for the day ahead.



Maintain a regular sleep and wake schedule

This helps us stay in synch with our body's circadian rhythms, which play an important role in helping us stay alert during the day and sleep well at night. When you are working rotating shifts and night shifts, try to keep as close to your "normal" schedule as you can.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that interfere with sleep

Caffeine too close to your bedtime can keep you up and interfere with sleep. Alcohol may help you fall asleep, but it can really disrupt the rest of your nighttime sleep. Avoid caffeine, alcohol and other drugs within three hours of bedtime.

Make your bedroom a comfortable sleep environment

Generally, we all sleep better in cool, quiet and dark rooms. Adjust room temperature down to help lower core temperature as you drop into sleep, and use ear plugs if necessary. Use dark or "black-out" curtains or a sleep mask to block light if needed.

Establish a calming pre-sleep routine

Take some time to wind down before heading off to sleep. Avoid television or electronic screen-based devices during this time as the blue light from these devices signal our brain to move us toward alertness.

Go to sleep when you're truly tired

Pay attention to what your body and mind are telling you and head off to sleep when you are feeling tired.

Don't watch the clock at night

Watching the clock alerts the mind and can anxiety, or "sleep dread" over not being able to fall asleep. Try some relaxation exercises and deep breathing to relieve stress and promote sleepiness.

Don't nap too close to your regular bedtime

Many of us carry around a sleep debt as a result of not getting the full amount of nighttime sleep we need each day. In these instances, napping is a great way to revive our minds and relieve our sleep pressure. Naps too close to our regular bedtime can reduce sleep pressure to the point where it interferes with our main sleep period. Avoid naps within three hours of bedtime.

Eat and drink enough — but not too much or too soon before bedtime

While we sleep our digestive systems slow way down. So, overeating, or eating too close to bedtime can cause restlessness and stomach problems that interfere with sleep. If you need to eat before bedtime, eat lightly.

Exercise regularly — but not too soon before bedtime

Exercise promotes alertness during the day and helps the body and mind sleep more soundly at night. But, exercising too close to bedtime can raise our core temperature, make it difficult to nod off and disrupt your night of sleep. Avoid exercise within three hours of bedtime.

You can learn more about healthy sleep habits and download a *Healthy Sleep Checklist* by visiting the *Fully Charged* website. (https://my.faa.gov/org/linebusiness/ato/safety/fully_charged.html)



Related articles:

- **The Importance of Sleep**
- **The Impact of Sleep on Obesity, Diabetes and Safety**