

## 10 Easy steps to help you get a good night's sleep



### **1. Have a consistent sleep schedule**

Try to go to bed and wake up at the same times every day, even on weekends. This sets a rhythm that helps your body anticipate rest. It helps regulate your body's internal clock - your circadian rhythm - and will make it easier to fall asleep.

### **2. Create a consistent bedtime routine**

Create your own bedtime routine and start winding down an hour before you plan to go to bed.

Take out 20 minutes for the tasks you need to do to prepare for the next day. That way you can start with a calm morning without feeling

stressed about getting ready to go. Perhaps you need to prepare your bag, lay out your clothes, prepare your food to take with you, etc. Have everything ready the night before.

Next, take 20 minutes for your evening hygiene, cleaning teeth, washing your face, etc. Just getting ready for the night.

### **3. Relax with a Meditation**

When you are ready and in bed, take time out for some relaxation before falling asleep. Just 10 -20 minutes of listening to a guided meditation, will help you put all your thoughts of the day aside, and relax your mind. A meditation can put you in a very relaxed state and ease you into a good night's sleep.

Plug your earphones in and choose a guided meditation from your own library, or from YouTube, and feel yourself relax. I can recommend listening to a Yoga Nidra meditation with Ally Boothroyd on YouTube.

If you are not keen on meditations, reading is another good alternative. But caution here - by reading I mean a peaceful story or article, not an unputdownable book that keeps you up all night. Read something that makes you feel good and perhaps even makes you smile.

### **4. Let your breathing help you relax.**

Breathing exercises can both relax you and energize you anytime, anywhere. It's one of the most important tools you have which helps you reduce stress and anxiety - two things that often keep us awake at night. When you focus on taking deep breaths, your body gets a signal to slow down. When you concentrate on your breathing, you stay in the present moment, which stops you thinking about the past and the future. There's just the present moment with you lying in your bed, without worrying thoughts about what happened yesterday or what might happen tomorrow. You're just focusing on your breathing.

There are many different breathing exercises. This one is a simple breathing exercise which you can use anytime during the day if you feel overwhelmed, or just need to calm down and centre yourself.

Try this easy 4-4-4 breathing exercise: Take a deep breath in through your nose inhaling to the count of 4 - hold the breath to the count of 4 - exhale through the mouth to the count of 4. Open your lips slightly when you exhale as if you were blowing out a candle.

Take about 10 breaths like this and feel yourself ease into relaxation.

You can use this exercise anywhere, anytime if you feel stressed or anxious. When you are very busy and you feel the stress building up inside you, you can do this exercise sitting down or standing up. You can do it walking in the street, while doing your shopping or lying in bed in the evening ready for the night. It will return you to a calmer state of being.

## **5. Go on a late-night news diet**

Resist reading the news about an hour before going to bed. The news programmes rarely have good news, and bad news can cause anxiety and disturb your well-needed sleep. The same applies to reading emails and messages just before going to bed. That will make you think about work or all the things you have to do the next day. This may cause you stress and anxiety at a time when you need to relax and ease into deep sleep.

## **6. Mindful Eating**

Don't eat a heavy meal and go to bed on a full stomach. It takes the body 3-4 hours to digest the meal. It's not recommended to go to bed hungry either, that rises the level of Cortisol, which is a stress hormone.

With the discomfort of a heavy meal in your stomach, your body has to focus on the digestion of the meal, instead of focusing on the relaxation. It may take you longer to fall asleep. If you are hungry in

the evening, choose to eat a light snack within 200 calories at the most. Sleep inducing food contain Tryptophan, which is a protein building block creating the hormones Serotonin, which helps you relax, and Melatonin, which helps you fall asleep. It is found in most proteins and dairy foods - for instance, oats, dried dates, yoghurt, whole-grain cereal and bananas.

## **7. Limit Caffeine**

Try to have no caffeine about 4 hours before going to bed. Coffee can disturb your restorative sleep and reduce your sleep-time. Too much coffee during the day can lead to restlessness at night. You may fall asleep at first but wake up a few hours later and be wide awake - this is my own experience. I have found that too much green tea has the same effect, even if there is much less caffeine in tea than coffee.

If you are trying to cut down on caffeine, you may want to try decaffeinated coffee. There is a difference between Decaffeinated and Caffeine-free coffee. Decaffeinated coffee still contains a small amount of caffeine. Look for the Caffeine-free label if you want no caffeine at all.

## **8. Slow and gentle exercises are your allies**

A few calming exercises before going to bed promotes relaxation. Do a few simple, light and soothing stretching exercises, either sitting or lying in bed.

Here is an example of an exercise that will help you relax. In this exercise you'll tense different muscles in your body, hold the tension to the count of 5, and then release the tension.

Lie down in bed on your back with your arms to the sides, palms up and away from your body. Close your eyes. Take a few deep, slow breaths to relax your mind. Start with your right leg, lift it up just about 10 centimetres, and hold it for the count of 5, feeling the tension in that leg, then let it go. Do the same with your left leg, lift it up about 10 centimetres, hold it for the count of 5, feel the tension and then let

it go. Proceed through your body in this way. Lift the right and left arms and your head, make a fist, and feel the tension in your arms and neck, hold the tension for the count of 5 and then let go of the tension with a big sigh. This exercise will help you unwind and promote a peaceful night's sleep.

### **9. Keep it dark and limit your screentime**

Make sure your room is dark with no lights on. Lights at night make the body think it's daylight, and it will not release the hormone Melatonin that helps you fall asleep. Melatonin is produced in the body naturally and at night the levels of Melatonin rise to help you fall asleep. The blue light from electronic devices blocks the production of Melatonin and it can disrupt your sleep. Try using a pair of blue-light blocking glasses when using your devices in your bedroom, you might find yourself sleeping better.

### **10. Optimize your sleep environment**

Think of your bedroom as your sanctuary. Make sure your bedroom is comfortable and dark. Check that your pillow is comfortable for you. Dark blackout curtains keep the outside world at bay and create a serene atmosphere.

Sleep is an important part of your self-care and by improving your sleep, you are better equipped to start a new day and deal with its challenges.

*Sarah*