

Living Well:

Managing Sleep



While difficulties with sleep are common to individuals with aging and with certain health conditions, there are many behaviors and strategies that can help. Below are some suggestions you might find useful:

Establish a bedtime routine.

A bedtime routine begins to signal to the brain that it is time to sleep. Consistently engage in winding-down activities that are pleasant and non-activating such as a bath, reading or listening to music. Limit work and triggering activities (i.e. agitating news programs, family arguments, paying bills) one hour before bedtime.

An example of a bedtime routine might look like this:

- 9:00 pm: warm bath with lavender oil
- 9:45 pm: wash face and brush teeth
- 10:00 pm: relaxation practice, such as meditation/stretching
- 10:30 pm: lights out

Mimic natural light levels and minimize screen exposure during winding down.

Be sure to get exposure to natural light during the day. This will help set your body's sleep-wake cycle, known as the 'circadian rhythm'. Start dimming the lights an hour or so before bedtime and keep artificial light to a minimum in the bedroom. You can put tape over the LED lights on monitors and power strips. Blue light transmitted from screens can disrupt sleep signals in the brain. It is best to limit their use one to two hours before bedtime.

Refrain from vigorous exercise in the evening.

Focus on relaxing physical activities such as stretching. Save more vigorous exercises for during the day.

(Continued on back.)

While we can't force ourselves to fall asleep, we can establish a routine and environment that makes bedtime sleep more likely. The more regular you can become with your bedtime ritual, and the more sensory ways you can find to relax your body, over time your body will start to respond automatically and help you get a good night's sleep. Listed here are some proven strategies that may help to improve the quality of your sleep.

Make your bedroom conducive to sleep.

Create an environment that is dark, quiet and cool. Consider fans, eye masks, ear plugs and/or white noise machines. You may also consider light-blocking drapes if outside light is an issue.

Limit laying in bed awake.

If you wake up in the night, don't let yourself lie awake in bed longer than 20 minutes. Consider creating a 'nest' area or alternative place where you can go and sit until you feel drowsy enough to go back to bed to sleep. This helps the brain to associate the bed with sleeping only.

Discuss your bedtime ritual with your housemates and bed partners.

Working together can help you reduce conflict that can interfere with getting good sleep. For example, if your partner likes to watch TV in bed, you may need to brainstorm to come up with other compatible alternatives (i.e., they watch TV in another room or use headphones).

Find ways to manage anxiety at bedtime.

If you find yourself worrying a lot when you try to fall asleep, you might want to consider actually scheduling some time during the day to address these concerns. This may help reduce the random worries that pop up as you are trying to fall asleep. If they do pop up at night consider keeping a pen/paper by your bed to write down "To Do's," ideas or anxious thoughts to help you cope or let go so you can relax and fall asleep.

Try earlier naps.

If you currently nap during the day, you might want to experiment for a few days napping earlier in the day or for shorter periods and see if it makes any difference to your nighttime sleep quality. The goal is to help you with better quality sleep, not necessarily quantity, and naps may or may not interfere with this.

Regulate caffeine and alcohol.

Keep caffeinated beverages to a minimum, especially later in the day. Alcohol can also interfere with sleep quality.

The exercise prescription!

Daytime physical activity that is moderate to high intensity is beneficial to nighttime sleep quality. Do not exercise within 2 hours of going to sleep as it will energize you.

When in doubt, talk with your doctor.

Work with your doctor to determine whether any other underlying medical conditions might be interfering with your sleep.

