

Healthy Sleep Habits

Sleep plays an integral role in maintaining physical and mental health. Not getting enough quality sleep can interfere with a person's ability to store newly learned information, potentially leading to a negative impact on academic performance. In addition, sleep deprivation is associated with daytime sleepiness, depressed mood, impaired concentration and memory, and a weakened immune system. Practicing healthy sleep habits (also known as good sleep hygiene) can make a big difference in a person's quality of life. A considerable amount of research has demonstrated that practicing sleep hygiene strategies such as the ones listed below, improves sleep quality and prevents sleep disturbances among university students.

- **Maintain a regular sleep schedule seven days a week.** Wake up and go to bed around the same time every day (even weekends). This is, by far, the most important sleep hygiene measure. Consistent sleep and wake times help establish an internal sleep-wake clock which can help you feel more alert during the day. Avoid sleeping in on the weekends and daytime napping, both of which can disrupt your internal clock. If you must nap, limit it to 20-30 minutes.
- **Know how much sleep you need and make time for it.** While everyone has different sleep needs, recent research suggests that adults require an average of 8.25 hours of sleep per night. If you're not sure how much sleep you need, try this simple exercise: 1) Give yourself two weeks (perhaps through vacation) and go to bed at the same time every night; 2) Wake-up naturally – no alarm clocks; and, 3) For the first few days you will most likely sleep in. Eventually you'll start waking up around the same time every day, establishing the amount of hours your body needs.
- **Avoid heavy food, alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine close to bedtime.** Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and can prevent you from falling asleep if they are consumed too close to bedtime. Caffeine is found in a number of foods and drinks (including chocolate, tea, and some pain relievers, etc.). While alcohol sometimes makes users feel sleepy and may speed up the onset of sleep, as the body metabolizes the alcohol, it actually acts as a stimulant, preventing quality sleep and increasing awakenings during the night.
- **Exercise regularly.** As little as 20 minutes of moderate physical activity per day has been shown to improve sleep. Exercising too close to bedtime, however, can make it difficult for some people to fall asleep.
- **Keep a comfortable sleeping environment.** Use your bed for sleep and sex only. If you use your bed for other activities such as studying, your brain may associate your sleep spot with being awake and alert which can make it more difficult to fall asleep. Eliminate light and noise. If this is difficult, consider using ear plugs or an eye mask while you sleep. It's also helpful to keep your bedroom temperature below 75 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Create a bedtime routine.** Doing so will help prep your brain for bed, making it easier to fall asleep. Consider starting your routine 30-60 minutes before bed. Dim the lights and unplug from TV, laptops, and phones. Wash up and brush your teeth. Engaging in relaxing activities such as reading a book, deep breathing, or meditation are also helpful.

Still sleepy?

Some individuals struggle with insomnia, hypersomnia, or poor sleep quality even when practicing good sleep hygiene. Further medical or mental health intervention is recommended if practicing these sleep hygiene tips don't improve your sleep and feelings of alertness.

Online & Off-Campus Resources

Columbia Health: health.columbia.edu

Go Ask Alice!: goaskalice.columbia.edu

ASleep: <https://sleep.health.columbia.edu/>

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On-Campus Resources

Medical Services: 212-854-7426

Counseling & Psychological Services: 212-854-2878