



# Sleep Hygiene

## How does diet affect sleep?

**CAFFEINE** is a stimulant that activates the brain, so naturally it will interfere with the sleeping process. Excessive or regular use may cause withdrawal symptoms at night, leading to insomnia and restless sleep. You should limit caffeine intake to less than two servings per day, and suspend all use after noon.

**NICOTINE** is also a stimulant that interferes with sleep. Withdrawal from the drug at night can disrupt sleeping patterns, making it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep. Smokers and snuff users who break the habit generally are able to fall asleep faster and experience more restful sleep once the withdrawal symptoms subside.

**ALCOHOL** is a sedative that slows brain activity. It may help to induce sleep, but interferes with sleep maintenance later in the night. Having a drink just before bedtime may cause a person to wake up frequently during the night, have nightmares, and wake up with headaches. It is best to suspend all alcohol use four to six hours before bedtime.

**MEALS** just before bedtime generally tend to make it more difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. However, a small snack just before bedtime tends to promote sleep. Milk and other products that are loaded with carbohydrates make for good bedtime snacks.

## How does environment affect sleep?

**ENVIRONMENT**— Make sure that your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool. Try using blackout curtains or an eye-mask and a white noise machine or earplugs to block out noise. Designate the bedroom for sleeping and sex only so that you associate your bedroom with sleeping rather than activity or stress.

**CLOCKS**—Focusing on the time, how long you have been awake, or how much time you have left to sleep can cause anxiety and make it harder to fall or stay asleep. Try setting the alarm clock and facing it the opposite direction or hiding it in a drawer to relieve the pressure of clockwatching.

## What else can I do to sleep better?

**BEDTIME RITUALS**—Try doing the same thing every night before bedtime, whether it be taking a warm bath, reading in a dimly lit room, or listening to soft music. This will program your body to know when it is time to go to sleep, and eventually make it easier to fall asleep.

**REGULAR EXERCISE** will greatly increase the quality of sleep you are getting. Make sure that you exercise at least six hours before bedtime though, or it may be difficult to fall asleep.

**MANAGING STRESS**—If you have problems with racing thoughts at bedtime, designating time out of the day to think about your problems, journaling, or talking with someone can help to clear your head.

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