HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP ROUTINES

Develop sleep habits that promote a full night of sleep. Most people function best with 8 hours of sleep, but your requirement is unique to you. Sleep as long as needed to feel well-rested.

1. Establish a Sleep Schedule – A regular sleep schedule trains our biological clock in our brains to know when it is time for sleep and time to wake.
   a. Have consistent regular sleeping times (i.e. 10 PM to 6 AM).
   b. Wake up the same time each day, regardless of how poorly you slept the night before. Avoid oversleeping even on weekends or holidays.
   c. Avoid naps, particularly in the late afternoon or evening. If you MUST take a nap, make it a quick 20-minute power nap.

2. Sleep Preparation Ritual – Develop a sedentary evening routine that begins an hour or 30 minutes before the desired bedtime.
   a. Take a hot shower or bath - Coming out of a warm shower or bath into a cooler bedroom will cause a slight decrease in body temperature – a trigger for sleep.
   b. Read – reading will still the mind and relax you, but be sure to read something with ink pages, not a backlit tablet. Avoid reading in bed.
   c. Avoid mental or physical stimulation such as watching exciting TV or exercising.
   d. Go to bed only when you feel sleepy or tired. If you do not fall asleep in 15-20 minutes, leave the bedroom and engage in one of your sleep preparation rituals. Return to bed when you feel sleepy.

3. Consumption - Control what you consume so that it does not interfere with your sleep.
   a. Avoid eating within 2 hours of bedtime, but don’t go to bed hungry. If necessary, have a light snack, preferably warm milk.
   b. Avoid spicy foods. Not only might this help with sleep, it may also help with heartburn or acid reflux.
   c. Avoid fluids within 2 hours of bedtime to eliminate a trip to the bathroom in the middle of the night.
   d. Avoid caffeine late in the day, such as coffee, tea, or soft drinks. Caffeine is also present in some medications so be sure to read the label.
   e. Avoid nicotine prior to bedtime, or quit all together.
   f. No alcohol within four to six hours of bedtime. Some medications contain alcohol, so be sure to read the labels.

4. Exercise – Exercise is a great sleep inducer, when done at the right time.
   a. Exercise late in the day but at least 4 hours prior to bedtime.
   b. Exercise daily at the same time. This will help your body to adjust to a routine and help to induce a physical exhaustion at the end of the day.

5. Stress – Everyone experiences stress. Here are some tips on how to manage it:
   a. Do not lie in bed worrying about the challenges of the upcoming day. If necessary, set aside some “worry time” a couple of hours before you go to bed. Anything you cannot resolve during that time can be put off until the next day.
   b. Try breathing exercises – Breathe deeply and slowly, from the diaphragm while lying in bed. Inhale for six seconds and then exhale for six seconds. This slow deep breathing is a trigger to tell the body to relax.
   c. Try relaxation exercises – One exercise is to flex and then relax muscle groups, working one group at a time until you have completed your whole body. Paired with breathing exercises, this helps your body to release tension and fully relax.