



Practicing Good

Sleep Hygiene

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Importance of Quality Sleep

Chapter 1

What is Sleep Hygiene?

Good hygiene habits — think brushing your teeth or washing your hands — are an essential part to your day. You already are most likely practicing good hygiene on a daily basis. You might not know how important hygiene habits are to getting a good night sleep.

Sleep hygiene is different than what you might think, although it is nice to go to bed with your teeth brushed and your body clean. Sleep hygiene instead refers to healthy sleep habits that can improve how you fall asleep and stay asleep.

Problems with sleeping are fairly common. One in four people report experiencing sleep difficulties, which include trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, early morning waking, sleeping too often, or restless and unsatisfying sleep.

Hygiene of all kinds are important to your health and well-being as most are aimed at reducing your chances of coming into contact with diseases, infections, germs, viruses, and cavities. Sleep hygiene is no different than other types of hygiene as it is aimed at improving your sleep, and subsequent overall health.

The biggest culprits behind poor sleep are sleep disorders and poor sleep habits. If you are experiencing snoring or pauses in breathing while you sleep you need to make an appointment with your physician first to rule out dangerous sleep disorders such as sleep apnea.

The good news is that poor sleep habits can be fixed so you can get back to getting quality and restorative sleep.



Importance of Quality Sleep

Your physical and mental health depend on it.

When you sleep, your body is hard at work preparing for the next day. In the brain, pathways are being formed that are critical to learning new things, processing information, and storing important memories.

Sleep deficiency can lead to difficulties with making decisions, problem solving, and controlling emotions and behaviors. Sleep deprivation is also linked to depression, suicide, and risk taking.

Your physical health is also dependent on quality sleep. During sleep your body is repairing and regenerating bones, muscle tissues, and the various systems of your body.

Insufficient sleep can lead to many health problems including heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke among others.

The strength of your immune system is also codependent upon quality sleep. Studies have shown that poor sleep can lead to the body having trouble fighting infections.



Impact on mental health due to sleep deprivation:

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Forgetfulness
- Distractibility
- Lack of motivation
- Symptoms of depression
- Chronic stress

Impact on performance due to sleep deprivation:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Lack of overall energy
- Poor decision making abilities
- Decreased sex drive
- Lowered alertness and reaction timing
- Easily distracted
- More likely to make errors and mistakes
- Short-term and long-term memory problems
- Cognitive impairment

Health problems associated with sleep deprivation:

- Heart disease
- Heart attack
- High blood pressure
- Irregular heartbeat/arrhythmias
- Increased risk of stroke
- Diabetes
- Obesity/weight gain

Sleep Hygiene

Changing Your Personal Habits

Personal habits consist of things you do from the time you wake up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night.



Make changes to your daily routine by eliminating unhealthy sleep habits and promoting habits that facilitate better sleep. Health habits include creating a consistent bedtime routine, exercising regularly, eating healthy foods, avoiding eating close to bedtime, avoiding alcohol and caffeine, getting plenty of natural light, and practicing relaxation techniques.

Getting enough sleep:

Not being able to fall asleep, frequent sleep disturbances, and daytime sleepiness are all signs that you are practicing poor sleep hygiene. You should consider looking into your sleep nightly sleep routing if sleep disorders aren't the cause of your nighttime sleep woes.

Revising your bedtime routine and sleep habits could make the difference between a good night's sleep and a night of misery.

The first step in creating good sleep hygiene habits is to evaluate how much sleep you are getting. The average adult needs to be getting between seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

Not getting in enough sleep can lead to sleep debt. Sleep debt occurs much in the same way financial debt occurs. If you don't have enough sleep each night, your body will "overdraw" from your energy reserves leading to mental and physical fatigue.

Too many individuals make getting enough sleep a priority. Squeezing in more hours of work, socializing, or even managing the house become more important than hitting the pillow.

Track the amount of hours you sleep over a two-week period. Consider cutting back on extra activities if you are consistently falling short of sleep each night. If you are still struggling, consider scheduling your sleep time just like you would any other important task.

There are some barriers to getting enough sleep that can't be avoided. Some of these barriers include parenting young children who still wake frequently through the night or complicated work schedules. In such cases, make sure you can squeeze in a nap to make up for the sleep lost during the night.

Changing Your Personal Habits

Avoiding stimulants

What you do during the day and before bed is an important part of your sleep hygiene habits.

Stimulants like coffee and energy drinks can give you the extra kick you need during the day to overcome the fact that you are sleeping well, but you may be creating a vicious cycle.

Too much caffeine can interfere with your body's signals that it's time to fall asleep. You then fail to get enough sleep needing even more caffeine the next day to overcome the drowsiness from not sleeping. Part of your sleep hygiene routine should be limiting or eliminating caffeine from your daily routine.

Nicotine can also affect your body's ability to sleep so avoid smoking close to bedtime by causing you to be jittery. Alcohol may help you fall asleep faster, drinking it too close to bedtime can disrupt your sleep during the night as your body begins to process the alcohol. Try to avoid smoking or drinking right before bed.

Other stimulants — bright alarm clocks, external lights, and blue lights from electronic — can mess up your natural sleep/wake cycle. There are ways to combat lights that mess up your body's attempt to sleep.

Cover up your bright alarm clock or invest in one with dim lighting. Dark curtains can block out the light coming from outside your bedroom. Avoiding the light from your electronic devices is as simple as not turning them on.

Watching television or being on an electronic device right before bedtime can stimulate your brain and block the signals that it's time to sleep. It's best to steer clear of stimulating media for at least 30 minutes before you plan to sleep.

Try and stay clear of eating any food right before bedtime that can be disruptive to your sleep. If you are prone to indigestion, try to avoid heavy or rich foods, fatty or fried foods, spicy dishes, citrus fruits, and carbonated drinks. Painful indigestion or heartburn can disrupt your sleep.

If you are hungry before bed, try eating light cheese and crackers, sliced turkey, or bananas, or drink a warm glass of milk.

Avoid alcohol before bedtime

Many people falsely believe that alcohol helps promote sleep as it makes them drowsy and more likely to fall asleep quicker. However, once your body begins to metabolize the alcohol there is a period of arousal, which disturbs one's sleep.



Sleep Hygiene

Changing Your Personal Habits

Daytime sleep hygiene

What you do during the day has a great effect on how you sleep at night. One of the best ways to get good sleep is to get moving during the day. Exercise gets your body ready for quality sleep.

Even just ten minutes of aerobic exercise, such as walking or riding a bike, can improve your sleep. Shoot for at least 30 minutes of exercise three times a week. The best time to get moving is late afternoon or early evening.

Strenuous exercise should be avoided right before you go to sleep as a lot of activity sends the signal that it isn't time to sleep. Early morning exercise does wonders for your health but won't help with your sleep.

Limit your daytime naps to 20-30 minute. A short nap can help improve your mood, alertness, and performance. Too much daytime napping can lead you to not feel sleepy when you need to be sleeping.

Spending time outside can also help you with sleep. Exposure to natural light during the day as well as darkness at night helps your body maintain a natural circadian rhythm (sleep-wake cycle). Staying cooped up inside all day can send mixed signals to your body about when you should be sleeping and when you should be awake.



Exercise breeds energy and also helps reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Exercise in the late afternoon is best for sleep because the physical activity helps wear us out, and the post-workout body temperature drop helps cool the body, making sleep come more readily. However, exercise too close to bedtime can make sleep difficult to come, as your body doesn't have enough time to cool itself off.

Establish a regular bedtime routine.

Getting into a regular routine of going to bed and rising at the same times everyday is one of the most important practices you can perform for better sleep. Part of keeping a healthy bedtime routine is to keep it up even on the weekends by avoiding staying up late and sleeping in. Depriving yourself of sleep during the midweek and binge-sleeping on the weekends does more harm to your sleep cycles than good.

Eat healthy

It's no secret that some foods are great for sleep, and others can help keep us awake at night. Fatty foods, processed carbs, and spicy foods are the worst for sleep. Foods high in fat and processed carbs don't have the nutrients and vitamins your body needs to produce energy, leaving you feeling sluggish during the day. Spicy foods, eaten too close to bedtime, can disrupt your sleep by causing acid reflux, which can disturb your sleep. Foods that promote sleep are those that are high in amino acids, proteins, antioxidants, and vitamins.

Changing Your Personal Habits



STEPS TO BETTER SLEEP

SLEEP HYGIENE



Allow enough time for sleep



Make your bedroom a peaceful, tidy place



Get a regular schedule



Avoid heavy meals, alcohol, caffeine before sleep



Avoid exercising 3 hours before sleep



Avoid TV beds and other media-furniture



Avoid bright light for two hours before bed



Create an ideal sleep Environment

Where you sleep can have a dramatic impact on *how* you sleep. Maximizing your sleep environment can influence the quality of sleep you get every night.



Change how you think about your room

One of the biggest keys in maximizing the efficiency for sleep in your room is what you associate your room with. Ideally your room should be used for two purposes only: sleep and romance. Everything else done in your room serves no other purpose than to distract you from sleep. But how do you improve your room so that it's only associated with sleep?

Ditch the electronics

All electronic devices including TV's, tablets, laptops, cellphones, portable gaming systems, and e-readers should be ditched before bedtime. For starters, the content may be stimulating and keeping you awake as you play "just one more game" or read "just one more post." Furthermore, the light emitting from these devices is similar in wave-length to daylight and can trick your circadian rhythm into believing it's daylight and delay the release of melatonin, a hormone that promotes sleep.

Keep your room dark

Light is bad for sleep as it can disrupt your circadian rhythm. Keep your room dark by using heavy window shades, wearing a sleep mask, and avoiding staring at glowing electronics.

If you refuse to remove your cellphone from the room, one helpful tip is to flip it over, screen-side down, during bedtime. Many phones light up when there's an incoming text, email, or push notification from an app that may distract you from sleep or even wake you from sleep.

Keep your room quiet

Noise can keep you awake so make sure your room is as free of unnecessary sounds as possible. If you're still having trouble sleeping because of noisy neighbors or others in the house consider using earplugs to block out sound or try "white noise." Fans and sound machines that make continuous rhythmic sounds can be both relaxing and aid in drowning out distracting or sudden noises.

Create an ideal sleep environment continued

Where you sleep can have a dramatic impact on *how* you sleep. Maximizing your sleep environment can influence the quality of sleep you get every night.



Keep your room cool

As you go to sleep your body temperature begins to drop as it prepares itself for slumber. Keeping your room a cool temperature (between 60-67 degrees) can help aid the process of cooling your body.

Sleeping naked not only increases the chances you'll sleep comfortably and soundly, it also helps cool your body down by eliminating nightgowns and pajamas that may keep your body temperature.

Make your bed as comfortable as possible

Most mattresses are good for about 9 years. If your mattress is out of date or uncomfortable, getting a new mattress can go a long way towards great sleep. There are mattresses available to suit all types of sleep needs including adjustable stiffness, preferred sleep positions, disturbances from a tossing/turning partner, or even have covers if you have allergies to certain fabrics or dust mites.

Having an uncomfortable pillow or bedding can keep you from sleep as well. If you're constantly readjusting your pillow before bedtime, it may be time to get a new one.

Set your alarm and keep it away from your bed.

Too often people get used to using their phone as their wake-up device. Having your phone close to your bed makes it too easy to continuously check it for new texts, emails, or just looking at the time. Constantly reminding yourself of the time can create anxiety, making sleep more difficult. Also, keeping your alarm away from your bed reduces the chances of hitting the snooze button over and over, and it makes you get up out of bed to shut it off.

Paint your room sleep friendly colors

A study in Britain showed that the color of your bedroom can impact the amount of sleep you get. In a survey of over 2,000 British homes it was found that the colors blue, yellow, and green helped sleepers get the most hours of sleep with blue averaging 7 hours 52 minutes, yellow at 7 hours 40 minutes, and green at 7 hours 36 minutes.

These colors are often associated with calmness and relaxation and can help put your mind at ease as you are trying to rest.

What if sleep hygiene isn't working?

If you are practicing these better sleep techniques and still find yourself feeling tired, rundown, or excessively sleepy during the day, it could be a sign of a sleep disorder



If you believe you have a sleep disorder, talk with your primary care physician About your symptoms. Alert them to the sleep hygiene practices and techniques you have implemented. Your doctor can help determine if a sleep study is right for you.

If you live in Alaska and want the best care possible, contact The Alaska Sleep Clinic for a free 10-minute phone consultation by calling 907-770-9104. Or visit www.alaskasleep.com/sleep-assessment