

Healthy Sleep

Why Do We Need Sleep?

All cells – including brain cells – produce waste products as they work. During sleep, your body pumps cerebrospinal fluid through your brain to wash away those waste products. If you don't get enough sleep, cellular waste builds up so that your cognitive functions slow down, you make more mistakes, and you feel lousy.

Cognitive Strategies for Sleep

- Don't worry so much about your sleep. When your body really needs it, you'll sleep. Until then, the worst that can happen is that you'll feel tired the next day. That's not a catastrophe.
- If you're not asleep within 15-minutes of putting your head on the pillow, you're probably ruminating over something stressful. Don't just lay there. Get up, do something for 10-minutes, and try again.
- Identify some happy memories that you can visit while trying to fall asleep. Intentionally choosing something to think about will prevent the unwanted intrusion of stressful thoughts.

Sleeping with Back Pain

- If you have back pain, your sleep position will greatly affect the quality of your sleep.
- You should avoid sleeping on your stomach because that position will arch your back and increase pain.
- It's probably best that you sleep on your back. If that's just not your thing, try sleeping on your side with a pillow between your legs.

Behavioral Strategies for Better Sleep

- Make sure your sleep environment is comfortable, quiet, and dark.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule. By getting up and going to bed at the same time each day, you'll train your body to fall asleep on schedule.
- Avoid the temptations of sleeping-in on weekends or taking daytime naps. Those things can disrupt your circadian rhythms and make it more difficult to fall asleep at your desired bedtime.
- Avoid lounging in your bed. Your bed should be used only for sleeping so that laying in it cues your body to feel sleepy.
- Exercise as directed by your MD, but don't workout too close to bedtime. Endorphins usually make us feel better, but they can also interfere with sleep.
- Don't eat in the hours before bed because the digestion process keeps your body active.
- Don't drink caffeine or alcohol in the hours before bedtime because they can make you restless.
- Don't smoke too close to bedtime, either, because nicotine is a stimulant that will keep you awake.
- If you know you'll need to urinate during the night, set your alarm for your typical pee-time. By making it part of your routine, getting up will be less disruptive to your sleep cycle.
- Schedule a physical. Although sleep problems are often the result of sub-optimal habits, you should rule out any medical causes.

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