

Change the way you sleep

1. Keep your bedroom for sleeping (and sex)

- **Do not use your bedroom for different activities** like watching television, working, studying or exercising. You need to create a strong association between your bedroom and sleep.



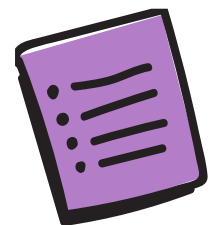
2. Create a restful place to sleep

Your bedroom should be dark, quiet, comfortable and peaceful:

- **Is any light disturbing you?** Use eye masks or put up black-out curtains.
- **Is the temperature right?** Are you too hot or too cold?
- **Are you disturbed by any noise?** If you are bothered by noisy neighbours or a noise from the street - try ear plugs. If your partner snores or is restless - ask he/she to sleep in another room while you are learning new sleeping habits.
- **Is it a calm space?** Clear out any clutter and do not use your bedroom for work, studying, exercising, hobbies or watching TV.
- **Is your bed comfortable?** Make sure your mattress is giving enough support. Too many pillows or pillows that are too thin can strain the neck and cause headaches.

3. Create a sleep routine and wind down before you go to bed

- **Start your own bedtime routine** - creating a nightly ritual can help your mind and body know it's time to sleep. Start to unwind an hour before going to bed, listen to relaxing music, have a milky drink or practise some breathing exercises. A warm bath can help you feel drowsy. Plan to do more demanding, difficult tasks earlier in the day and if you are working late build in some time to relax.
- **Go to bed when you are sleepy** - don't go to bed too early or too late.
- **Try an essential oil** - put a few drops of oil like lavender on your pillow and breathe deeply as you drift off to sleep. A few drops in your bath can also be restful.
- **Get up at the same time each morning** - even if you are tired and haven't slept well.





4. Re-train your sleeping habits

- **Don't lie awake clock-watching** - this will only allow negative thinking to continue and will wake you up if you keep looking at the clock to read the time.
- **If you don't fall asleep in 20 minutes get up** - do some breathing exercises, listen to some relaxing music or flick through a magazine - any gentle activity that won't stimulate the brain. Don't watch TV, drink caffeinated drinks or sit in a strong light - as this will tell your brain to wake up. Go back to bed when you feel drowsy and repeat if you still don't fall asleep. Don't try to force yourself to sleep. This process will help to stop the cycle of negative thoughts and remove negative associations with your bedroom.
- **Keep thoughts as positive as you can** - it is easy to stay awake thinking about all the things that you haven't done, the things that have gone wrong or the things that you are worried about. Instead focus on (or write down) the things that you have achieved, the things that have gone well and things you are grateful for. Practise some Mindfulness to help stop negative thoughts from racing. Concentrate on your breathing and on the feeling of being wrapped in a duvet or sheets and the feeling of your head touching the pillow.
- **Don't nap during the day** - if you feel sleep coming, get up and go for a walk or read a book. Don't close your eyes and give in to sleep - it will make it harder to sleep later at bedtime. Napping can also break the sleep cycle and stop you from getting good quality deep sleep.

5. Tackle any worries

- **Use a problem-solving technique** to deal with any problems that are keeping you awake. This will help you consider the pros and cons of different solutions and come up with an action plan. If you are worrying about a problem such as debt - ignoring it will only make it worse. Tackle it today.
- **Keep a pen and paper next to your bed** - if you find yourself feeling anxious during the night write a list of all the things that are worrying you and set a time to deal with them.

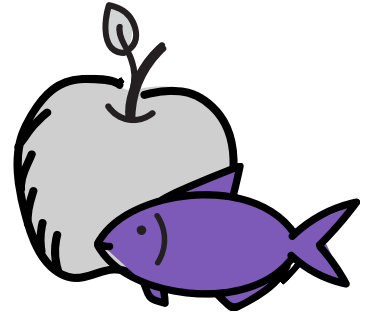


6. Exercise

- **Exercise can help you sleep better** - doing some moderate exercise like swimming, walking or yoga in the early evening (not in the three hours before bedtime) can help you have a good night's sleep.

7. Watch what you eat and drink

- **Cut down on caffeine** - caffeine is a stimulant that can stop you from sleeping. Don't drink coffee, hot chocolate, cola or tea after 6.00pm.
- **Cut down on alcohol** - don't use alcohol to help you sleep. It may help you to fall asleep but your sleep will be lighter and you are likely to wake during the night. Alcohol can cause headaches and dehydration as well.
- **Drink less in the evening** - this will reduce the need to get up during the night to go to the toilet.
- **Plan your last meal of the day** - you should finish your evening meal two to three hours before bedtime. Eating later can raise your blood sugar and insulin levels which can stop you from sleeping. If you are hungry have a light snack like crackers or a banana with a milky drink or herbal tea. Foods like dairy, oats and rice produce melatonin which can help you sleep. Avoid sugar.
- **Smoking is a stimulant** - do not smoke in the three hours before going to bed and never during the night.



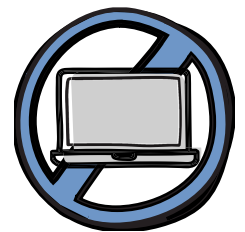
8. Practise relaxation and breathing techniques



- **Practising some relaxation exercises** for 15 minutes in the evening can help you to relax and can combat anxiety. Meditation, Mindfulness and gentle yoga can also help to re-focus and calm the mind. Take a little time afterwards to sit calmly with a herbal tea.

9. Don't use electronic devices before you go to bed

- **The blue light displays on electronic screens can reduce melatonin, the chemical that helps us sleep** - don't use a computer, tablet or smartphone in the hour before you go to bed and don't leave a device near your bed where the light can disturb your sleep.
- **Don't frazzle your brain with too much information** - surfing the internet, texting, checking social media, sending work emails and watching TV near bedtime will all stimulate the brain and lead to information overload.



10. Check your medications

- **Some medications like anti-depressants can affect your sleep** - talk to your GP if you are concerned.

