



Tips for Improving the Quality of your Sleep

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We all need sleep to function, and the quality of your sleep directly impacts your performance, health, and mood. What defines quality sleep? A common recommendation is to get 7-8 hours of sleep, but quantity of sleep doesn't always reflect quality, and the amount of sleep an individual needs varies greatly across the lifespan. Consider instead reflecting on the following three questions:

- Are you able to fall asleep at night?
- Are you able to stay asleep during the night; or are you able to return to sleep if you wake up?
- Do you wake up feeling rested?

Investing in your sleep hygiene may help improve the quality of your sleep (and therefore, waking hours) regardless of your answers to these questions.

Insomnia is perhaps the most well-known sleep disorder. Insomnia can occur across one or more of the following patterns: difficulty falling asleep, awaking throughout the night, and early morning wakening. There are other mental health concerns that can impact sleep in similar ways. For example, anxiety can often make it difficult to fall asleep or return to sleep once awake, and some people who experience depression report early morning wakening. The snowball effect of ongoing reduced sleep, known as sleep debt, can amplify brain and body disfunction. A large component of the leading treatment for insomnia (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia, CBT-i) is sleep hygiene, a set of behaviors supportive of quality rest and sleep. Below are some sleep hygiene-based behaviors that are associated with increased quality of sleep:

Establish a routine for the end of your day that supports falling asleep. This will look different for everyone but may include:

- Relaxing stretches, breathing exercises, or meditation.
- Taking a warm bath about an hour before bed raises your body temperature, encouraging sleepiness as your body temperature drops back down.
- Relaxing activities such as reading or listening to music.
- Having a light snack or small cup of herbal tea an hour before bed.
- It is important to go to bed and rise at the same time each day, including weekends and holidays when possible. Consistency supports your internal sleep-wake cycle.
- Try progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). If you'd like to avoid reaching for your phone at night, learn the basics by practicing during the day.

Create an environment that supports your sleep. There are many reasons why falling sleep is difficult or interrupted. Consider the following:

- Maintain a quiet, dark room at a comfortable temperature (many people report sleeping better in a cooler room).
- If you are easily awakened by noise, try sleeping with earplugs or using a white noise machine.
- Try an eye mask or blackout shades if you find that light is disturbing your sleep, but make sure to support your sleep-wake cycle by letting sunlight into the room as soon as you wake up.
- If you tend to ruminate after discovering what time it is when you wake in the middle of the night, remove clocks, or relocate them out of your line of sight.
- Re-evaluate the benefits of co-sleeping with pets that move, cause noise, or disrupt your positioning while sleeping.



Know what to avoid. There are many common culprits of sleep disturbance. If you're having difficulty sleeping, consider the following known disrupters:

- Use your bedroom exclusively for sleep and intimacy, if it is a part of your lifestyle. Avoid working, eating, reading, or watching TV in bed.
- For some people, exercising before going to bed negatively impacts their ability to fall asleep, while for others exercising in the evening can improve sleep. If you are the former, avoid exercising two to three hours before your target bedtime.
- Avoid taking naps after 3 PM.
- Avoid afternoon and evening caffeine intake.
- Avoid consuming heavy meals, alcohol, nicotine, or other stimulants, close to bedtime. Food and psychoactive chemicals alter blood sugar in ways that negatively impact REM sleep.
- Avoid the use of electronic devices before bed because the blue light on your screens also negatively impacts REM sleep.

If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep within a reasonable amount of time, get out of bed and try reading, listening to music, gentle stretches, meditation, or another activity you find relaxing until you feel sleepy enough to head back to bed. Talk to your healthcare provider if you experience or are concerned about sleep disturbances caused by sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, TMJ, or other concerns. Consider keeping notes or a sleep diary that details hours of sleep, types of disturbances, etc. to share with your provider. Interested in sleep hygiene but not sure where to start? Reach out to COLAP for a free, confidential well-being consultation.

For more well-being related strategies visit the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP) website at www.coloradolap.org or contact us at info@coloradolap.org or (303) 986-3345 to request a confidential, free well-being consultation.

