10 TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP
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1. **Stick to a schedule, and don’t sleep late on weekends**
   If you sleep late on Saturday and Sunday morning, you’ll get Sunday night insomnia. Instead go to bed and get up about the same time every day. If you are going to ‘play up’ and get to bed later than usual try and get up by 7am. It’s **sleeping late** that causes most disruption to the body clock.

   You don’t need to rely on an alarm clock to wake you up when you get enough sleep.

2. **Don’t eat or drink a lot before bedtime**
   Eat a light dinner about two hours before sleeping. If you drink too much liquid before sleeping you’ll wake up repeatedly in the night for trips to the bathroom.

   Don’t eat spicy or fatty foods. They can cause heartburn, which may interfere with your sleep.

   If you get the bedtime munchies, eat something that triggers serotonin, which makes you sleepy. Carbohydrates (bread or cereal) or foods containing the amino acid L-tryptophan (milk, tuna or turkey) will do the trick.

   Don’t drink alcohol near bedtime. It decreases your REM (Rapid Eye Movement or Dreaming Sleep) and Deep Sleep.

3. **Avoid caffeine and nicotine**
   They’re addictive stimulants and keep you awake. Smokers often experience withdrawal symptoms at night. Caffeine should be avoided for **eight hours** before your bed time (it has a significant half life which explains this long period).

4. **Exercise**
   If you’re trying to sleep better, the best time to exercise is in the afternoon. A programme of regular physical activity enhances the quality of nocturnal sleep. However substantive exercise (running, spin classes, aerobics etc) ‘alerts’ the body and it is best to stop 3 hours before sleep. Gentle stretching is good before bedtime as it puts muscles into a relaxed mode.

5. **A slightly cool room is ideal for sleeping**
   This mimics your internal temperature drop during sleep (body normally loses about 1 degree C when you sleep at night), so turn off the heat and save on fuel bills.

   If you can control the room temperature, set the dial for 19 degrees C.

For assistance, phone 0800 284 678
If you tend to get cold, use blankets. Try sleeping in warmer nightclothes and wear socks.

If you overheat at night, wear light nightclothes and sleep under a single sheet. Use an air conditioner or fan to keep the room cool.

6. **Sleep primarily at night**
   
   Daytime naps steal hours from night time slumber. Limit daytime sleep to less than one hour, no later than 3 pm.

   If you work nights, keep your window coverings closed so that sunlight which interferes with the body's internal clock, doesn’t interrupt you.

   If you have a day job and sleep at night, but you still have trouble waking up, leave the window coverings open and let the sunlight wake you.

7. **Keep it quiet**
   
   Silence is more conducive to sleep. Turn off the radio and TV. Use earplugs or a fan or some other source of constant, soothing background noise (sometimes called white noise) to mask sounds you can’t control, such as busy street, trains, airplanes or even a snoring partner. Double glazed windows and heavy curtains also muffle outside noise.

8. **Make your bed**
   
   A good bed is subjective and different for each person. Make sure you have a bed that is comfortable and offers orthopaedic comfort.

   If you share your bed, make sure there’s enough room for two. Children and pets are often disruptive, so you may need to set limits on how often they sleep in your bed with you.

   Use your bed only for sleep and sex. Read elsewhere before bed.

   Go to bed when you’re tired and turn out the lights. If you don’t fall asleep in 30 minutes, get up and do something else. Go back to bed when you are tired.

   Don’t agonise over falling asleep. This stress will only prevent sleep. Your brain and body like routine. Recognise your sleep signals (the brain and body saying to you “I am tired”) and ‘go with the flow’.

9. **Soak and sack out**
   
   Taking a hot shower or bath before bed helps bring on sleep because they can relax tense muscles and can trigger a body temperature drop (the hot water raises the body temperature, afterwards the body compensates by lowering temperature – the subsequent drop is a sleep signal).
10. **Don’t rely on sleeping pills**
Check with your doctor before using sleeping pills. Make sure the pills won’t interact with other medication or with an existing medical condition. Work with your doctor to gradually reduce medication.

Use the lowest dosage, and never mix alcohol and sleeping pills.

If you feel sleepy or dizzy during the day, talk to your doctor about changing the dosage or discontinuing the pills.

**DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF YOUR SLEEP**

The inability to get enough sleep may only last for a night or it can last for weeks, months, years or even a lifetime. If you have any of the following signs and symptoms, you may not be getting enough sleep:

- You routinely ignore your alarm clock or snatch a few extra minutes to snooze before getting up.
- You look forward to catching up on your sleep on the weekends.
- You have to fight to stay awake during long meetings, in overheated rooms or after a heavy meal.
- You’re irritable with co-workers, family and friends.
- You have difficulty concentrating or remembering.
- It takes you more than 30 minutes to fall asleep at night.
- You wake repeatedly throughout the night.
- You wake up groggy and not well rested.
- Your spouse or partner complains about your snoring or fitful sleeping.