

ANTHONY M. KASSIR, M.D.

A Professional Medical Corporation

Diplomate, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology
Fellow, American Psychiatric Association

120 Vantis, Suite 540
Aliso Viejo, California 92656

Office (949) 360-9500
Facsimile (949) 360-9501

Dr. Kassir's Top Ten Tips for Improving Sleep

Many people find these ten “sleep hygiene” tips valuable to establish a sleep pattern that is regular, practical, and satisfying. Everyone should practice good sleep hygiene.

1. **Go to sleep the same time every evening, and get up the same time every morning.** On the weekends or during vacations, do not alter this schedule. If you've been having problems sleeping, limit your time in bed to the amount of time you needed before the problems began. Most people need 7-9 hours of sleep, although this may vary.
2. **The bed should be used only for sleep and sex. If you are unable to fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something else until you're sleepy.** Many people find listening to *calming* music or reading quietly with *dim light* a good sleep-promoting activity. Do not watch television because it emits a relatively bright light, and is designed to keep you awake (to watch the commercials). Computer screens can be bright too, and computers can be stimulating (e.g., games, web animations, etc.). So avoid using a computer unless it relaxes you. If you use a computer, turn down the brightness and contrast.
3. If you have trouble getting to sleep, **try very hot, 20-minute, body-temperature-raising baths an hour to an hour and a half before bedtime.** These baths will help you relax and will lower your body's metabolism, which prepares you for sleep.
4. **Turn your clock away from your face so you can't look at it,** if you're having trouble sleeping and you find yourself repeatedly checking the time.
5. **In the evening, avoid smoking and do not eat stimulating substances such as chocolate. Do not drink any beverages that contain caffeine (such as coffee, some sodas) in the afternoon or evening, and do not drink alcohol in the evening.** Alcohol may help you fall asleep but it actually disrupts sleep after the sedating effect wears off. Caffeine taken in the afternoon may last long enough to disrupt sleep without your being aware of this effect.
6. **Establish physical fitness by means of a graded program of vigorous exercise early in the day, or at least before dinner. Always check with your primary care doctor before beginning a program of exercise.** If you exercise in the evening, note that a low point in energy occurs a few hours after exercise; sleep will then come more easily. Exercising close to bedtime (after dinner) may make falling asleep more difficult.
7. **Avoid daytime naps.** Some people sleep better at night if they do not nap during the day. Other people find a short afternoon nap does not interfere with sleeping at night. Let experience be your guide. If in doubt, avoid daytime naps. Do not nap in the evening.
8. **Avoid eating before bed.** Sleep is deeper and most restorative if the body is at rest. If you've eaten a significant amount of food before bed, your body has to work at digesting the food, which requires increased cardiac output and can cause other conditions or sensations (like heartburn) that may interfere with a deep level of rest. Drinking significant volumes of fluid can make you wake up to urinate when it would be better to enjoy uninterrupted sleep. Also, some sleeping medications do not work as well if you've eaten in the previous 2 to 4 hours.
9. If you have trouble getting to sleep, **practice evening relaxation routines 30 minutes before going to bed,** such as a leisurely walk, reading for pleasure, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation.
10. **Maintain a comfortable sleeping environment,** such as a comfortable temperature (relatively cool), a good mattress, good ventilation, and absence of noise. Some people find, after several days, that keeping bright lights on in the evening, then turning down the lights to a dim level about 30 minutes before bedtime, helps induce sleepiness. If you have a partner in bed who distracts you, moving to another bed or the couch for a few nights might help.