Sleep Hygiene Checklist

Simple Strategies for Better Sleep

Sleep hygiene means having good sleep habits. Everyone's sleep is different — review the strategies below and choose the ones that seem like the best fit for you.

Strategies to Try

Stop food and pre-sleep electronic use (60–120 minutes before bed). Stop eating well before bed. Preferably at least 2 hours, but no less than 1. Your body shouldn't have to be actively digesting your dinner while it's trying to sleep.

Electronics are mentally engaging and can unexpectedly stir up emotions — stress from an email, excitement from a story — which keeps you from winding down. The bright light also disrupts your natural light-dark sleep cycle. Skip emails, social media, and TV/movies before bed.

Use your bed only for sleep, sex, and sickness. Spending less time in bed for other activities helps your body associate the bed with rest, promoting deeper, more continuous sleep. Avoid eating, working, or watching TV in bed.

Skip naps. While naps can help after sleep deprivation, regular napping can interfere with nighttime sleep. Sleeping continuously at night is best — if you really need a nap, keep it before 3 p.m. and under an hour.

Keep a fixed bedtime and wake-up time. Waking up around the same time every morning — even on weekends — helps your body learn when it's time to fall asleep, improving your sleep over the long term.

Avoid caffeine and alcohol (6–8 hours before bed). Caffeine and other stimulants activate systems in the brain that maintain wakefulness. Alcohol requires metabolizing, and that process can fragment your sleep later in the night, even though it may feel relaxing at first.

Do relaxing activities before bed. Relaxing activities reduce physical arousal and quiet the mind, helping sleepiness set in. Avoid work or planning tasks at bedtime. Try stretching, calm music, slow breathing, or a warm shower.

Make a worry list. Falling asleep is harder when you're worrying or thinking through emotional things. Spend a few minutes before bed writing down what you want to remember for tomorrow — including your worries — so you can set them aside until then.

Do boring activities before bed. Boring activities slow down your thinking and help sleepiness arrive. Try listening to a podcast in a language you don't understand, or reading something unexciting, like terms and conditions or a dry textbook.

Improve your sleeping environment. Noise, light, and uncomfortable temperatures can all disrupt continuous sleep. Choose comfortable pillows and mattresses, remove distractions, and consider a sound machine, blackout curtains, or even socks.

Exercise at the right time. Exercise can help or hurt sleep depending on timing. Aim to exercise during the day, and avoid vigorous exercise within about 2 hours of bedtime, since it can increase alertness and delay sleep.

Get up and try again. If you can't fall asleep after 20+ minutes, get up and do something relaxing or boring rather than lying there frustrated. Try reading something dull or mentally listing categories (like dog breeds). Once you feel sleepy, return to bed.

Learn about sleep. Misunderstanding the science of sleep, or fixating on sleep difficulties, can actually make them worse. Learning accurate information about sleep can ease frustration and anxiety around it.

Talk with a professional if needed. If your sleep difficulties seem to go beyond habits, it's worth checking in with your provider or a sleep specialist. Addressing it sooner can save you a lot of difficulty down the road.

Your Sleep Hygiene Checklist

- ☐ Stop pre-sleep electronic use
- ☐ Skip naps
- ☐ Avoid caffeine and alcohol before bed
- ☐ Make a worry list
- ☐ Improve your sleeping environment
- ☐ Get up and try again if you can't sleep
- ☐ Talk with a professional if needed
- ☐ Use bed only for sleep, sex, and sickness
- ☐ Keep a fixed bedtime and wake-up time
- ☐ Do relaxing activities pre-sleep
- ☐ Do boring activities pre-sleep
- ☐ Exercise at the right time
- ☐ Learn about sleep

References

Stepanski, E.J. & Wyatt, J.K. (2003). Use of sleep hygiene in the treatment of insomnia. Sleep Medicine Reviews, 7, 215–25.

Hauri, P. (2011). Sleep/wake lifestyle modifications: Sleep hygiene. In Therapy in Sleep Medicine. Elsevier Saunders, Philadelphia, PA. pp. 151–160.

Czeisler, C.A. & Gooley, J.J. (2007). Sleep and Circadian Rhythms in Humans. Cold Spring Harbor Symposia on Quantitative Biology, 72, 579–97.

Xie, H., Kang, J., & Mills, G.H. (2009). Clinical review: The impact of noise on patients' sleep. Critical Care, 13(2), 208.

Irish, L.A., Kline, C.E., Gunn, H.E., Buysse, D.J., & Hall, M.H. (2014). The role of sleep hygiene in promoting public health. Sleep Medicine Reviews.

Boutrel, B. & Koob, G.F. (2004). What keeps us awake: the neuropharmacology of stimulants and wakefulness-promoting medications. Sleep, 27, 1181–94.

Driver, H.S. & Taylor, S.R. (2000). Exercise and sleep. Sleep Medicine Reviews, 4, 387–402.

Adapted from: Rith-Najarian, L. Sleep Hygiene Strategies. © StriveWeekly.com

