

14 Tips To Try For Better Sleep

As a college student, there are many factors that may make maintaining a regular sleep schedule difficult, such as living situation, studying for exams, late classes, and socializing. Below are some suggestions for ways you can modify your daily routine to promote better sleep:

1. **Stop using all technology 30 min before bed- no cell phone- no laptop- no tablet.** The light blocks melatonin which can help you fall asleep. A 30 min wind down with relaxation and reading (a paper book) can make it easier to fall asleep. Apps to reduce blue light on your devices are helpful when you need to work late, but still harmful if you're trying to sleep.
2. **No caffeine after 3 PM.** If you are up late studying or just need a little more energy, try a small energy-boosting snack instead of a caffeinated beverage. If you feel that you have to have caffeinated coffee when you are up late studying, try to limit the amount of caffeine by filling half your cup with decaffeinated coffee.
3. **Sleep only an hour longer during the weekend than your latest weekday wake-up time.** Keeping your sleep/wake schedules consistent will help your body sleep better.
4. **Incorporate a small amount of time each day to be outside in daylight.** Time spent outside during the day helps to preserve your body's sleep and wake cycles.
5. **Be physically active most days.** Exercise can promote more regular sleep and wake patterns as well as reduce stress. Avoid exercise and other vigorous activities three-to-four hours before going to bed to avoid awakening the body even more.
6. **Eat a regular meal schedule.** By eating smaller meals near bedtime, you will be more likely to have a good night's sleep.
7. **Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.** Alcohol is disruptive to sleep, particularly if you have a mental illness. Keep these facts in mind:
 - Sleep experts recommend avoiding alcohol at least four to six hours prior to bed.
 - Alcohol may help people fall asleep faster, but research has shown that alcohol disrupts sleep throughout the night.
 - Alcohol aggravates snoring and sleep apnea. Sleep apnea has been linked to chronic medical conditions including hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases.
 - Drinking alcohol while on medications, including psychiatric medications, can further worsen sleeping problems and side effects.
8. **Practice time management with your school work.** Try to stay on top of your school work to decrease your overall stress and worry, and to reduce last minute cramming. In addition, mentally plan for the next day before getting into bed. Journaling before bed is a technique that some students find to be helpful in addressing concerns before bed.
9. **Avoid all-nighters.** It is better to sleep the night before an exam, even if it means studying for fewer hours. Research has shown that a good night of sleep is more beneficial for learning than staying up late cramming.

10. **Don't rely on weekend catch up.** You may be tempted to rely on the weekend to “catch up” on sleep that you missed during the week. Generally, this only worsens your sleep pattern. The best solution is to get a regular amount of sleep as many nights as possible, and when necessary sleep only an hour longer during the weekend than your latest weekday wake-up time.
11. **Minimize Sleep Disruptions.** Living in places like student housing, apartments, or houses with a large number of people can make it very difficult to control your sleep environment. Below are some suggestions to help you minimize any sleep disruptions:
- Talk to your roommates about setting a regular sleep time so they can be respectful of your need for a quiet environment.
 - Purchase a white noise machine to block out unwanted sounds from within your own room or even outside. Instead of or in addition to the white noise machine, ear plugs or a small fan may be helpful.
 - Use a sleep mask to block out any unwanted light. This could be a great compromise with your roommate who may prefer to stay up later to study.
 - Create a comfortable sleeping area to improve your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. If you have the option, choose the pillows, mattress, and bedding that are most comfortable for you.
 - Keep the bedroom at a comfortable temperature (ideally, slightly cool), and well-ventilated.
12. **Use the bed only for sex and sleeping.** Avoid doing other activities such as studying or watching TV. This ensures that your body will not associate the bed with these activating tasks, which can make it harder to fall asleep. If there are few options other than your bed for these activities, reduce the level of intensity of the reading material or TV programs you select.
13. **Go to bed only when you are sleepy.** If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and do a relaxing activity somewhere else until you feel sleepy again. Try deep breathing or relaxation techniques if you're having trouble falling asleep due to stress or anxiety.
14. **Study your sleep patterns.** The more you know about your own sleep patterns and your own sleep needs, the more you can use sleep as a tool to increase your productivity and help you manage the symptoms of your mental illness. It may be helpful to track your sleep over the course of a week or two using a sleep diary. You may not realize how some of your habits may be making it more difficult for you to fall asleep or stay asleep.

TED Talks Video: Why do we sleep?

https://www.ted.com/talks/russell_foster_why_do_we_sleep?language=en

If you are having persistent sleep problems regardless of what measures you take to improve your sleep, or if you are concerned that you may have a sleep disorder, talk to your care provider.