

HOW TO GET BETTER SLEEP

Sleeping well is a habit that you can learn! Small changes can have big effects. Start today by following these rules:

Take care of your body

- Do not drink caffeine: no tea, coffee, or caffeinated sodas after 4 o'clock
- Do not eat a big or spicy meal late in the evening
- Do not go to bed hungry
- Avoid alcohol as it interferes with sleep

Physical exercise, such as a brisk walk, in the late afternoon can help to make your body tired and help you to sleep. Try to do some exercise every day.

Sleep only at night-time and do not have day-time naps, no matter how tired you feel. Naps keep the problem going by making it harder for you to get to sleep the next night.

Having a regular bedtime routine teaches your body when it's time to go to sleep.

- Have a soothing drink like chamomile tea or a milky drink
- Have a bath, or a routine of washing your face and brushing your teeth
- Go to bed at the same time each night
- When in bed, think of nice things (e.g. think of five nice things that happened that day – they might be big or small, such as a nice conversation, seeing the sunshine, or hearing nice music on the radio)
- Do a relaxed breathing exercise (one hand on stomach, the other on your chest, deliberately slow your breathing, breathe deeply in your stomach instead of high in your chest)
- Try and wake up the same time every day, even if this is tiring to begin with

Coping with bad dreams can be difficult. Some people don't like relaxation before going to sleep, or are scared of letting go. If that is you, try these preparation techniques instead:

- Prepare yourself in case you have bad dreams by thinking of a bad dream, then think of a different ending for it. Practice this new ending many times before going to sleep.
- Before going to sleep, prepare to re-orient yourself when you wake from a bad dream.
- Remind yourself that you are at home, that you are safe. Imagine your street, buses, and local shops.



Photo by Andrea Piacquadio

- Put a damp towel or a bowl of water by the bed to splash your face, place a special object by the bed, such as a photograph, or a small soft toy.
- Practice imagining yourself waking up from a bad dream and reorienting yourself to the present, to safety by splashing your face, touching a special object, having a bottle of rose or lavender essential oil to sniff, going to a window to see surroundings.
- When you wake up from a bad dream—move your body if you can and reorient yourself immediately (touching an object, wetting your face, going to the window, talking to yourself in a reassuring way).

Make your bedroom a pleasant place to be.

- Get a nightlight
- Keep it clean and tidy
- Introduce pleasant smells such as a drop of lavender oil onto the pillows
- Get extra pillows
- Make sure that your home is safe – e.g. doors locked, windows closed

REMEMBER: Bed is for sleeping, so if you cannot sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do another activity elsewhere, such as reading or listening to music (try and avoid TV as it can wake you up). After 15 minutes return to bed and try to sleep again. If you still can't sleep after 30 minutes, get up again. Repeat this routine as many times as necessary and only use your bed for sleeping in.