

Ten tips for a better night's sleep.

With around a third of the population experiencing the symptoms of Insomnia at some point in their life, it's probable you've experienced some sleeplessness yourself. Although it may only last a short while, sometimes sleeplessness can recur and become prolonged. But don't despair! There are plenty of simple things you can do to overcome sleeplessness and even prevent it from occurring in the first place. Here are The Insomnia Clinic's top ten tips for a better night's rest.

1. Create the right sleep environment

Take a look around your bedroom and see if there's anything which may prevent a good night's sleep. Is there a streetlight shining through the window? If so, get some better blinds or blackout curtains. How about your alarm clock? If it shines brightly, it might be preventing you from getting a proper night's sleep so consider changing it for one that doesn't light up - just make sure it doesn't tick too loudly! You also need to get the room temperature just right. Your body temperature fluctuates during sleep and extreme highs or lows can make it difficult to sleep. Make sure your room is free of light, noise and of a comfortable temperature.

2. Wind down before sleep

You come home late, exhausted and the first thing you want to do is get into bed and sleep. But it doesn't happen. Why? Because your mind is still active from the day's activity, and now that it's free from distractions it is free to wander, and keep you awake. Before going to bed, set aside some time to unwind by reading a book or listening to music. You may even want to consider starting a diary so you can unload your thoughts before getting your head down.

3. Avoid screens and electronic devices

Electronic screens on TVs, smart-phones and laptops give off blue light which reduces the body's production of melatonin. Keep the screens turned off while you are sleeping and avoid their use close to bedtime, particularly when getting out of bed following the fifteen-minute rule.

4. Avoid smoking, alcohol or meals around bedtime

If you are a smoker, you might think of a last cigarette before bedtime as a good way to unwind. However, nicotine is a stimulant and more likely to keep you awake. So if you can't quit smoking, then you should at least refrain from smoking within 2 hours of bedtime. Similarly, although alcohol helps many people unwind, after drinking, the quality of sleep is generally poorer than without, so avoid alcohol if sleeplessness is a problem. Meals are also best avoided within 2 hours of bedtime. Food is your body's fuel, the last thing you want to do is fuel up when you're ready to be turning off for the night.

5. Keep your bed for sleep and intimacy

By performing other activities in bed, such as watching TV, you subconsciously start to attach these activities to your bed. The result being that when you get into bed, your body starts to prepare yourself to watch TV rather than to sleep, so be sure to restrict your bedtime activities to sleep and sex.

6. The fifteen-minute rule

If you're lying in bed awake, there is a danger your body will begin to associate the bed with being awake. You should therefore give yourself fifteen minutes - taking care not to keep checking the clock - to get to sleep. If, after this time you are still awake, get out of bed and repeat your wind down routine until you start to feel sleepy. Keep repeating this cycle until you fall asleep.

7. Keep a strict waking time

If you're struggling to sleep, it can be all too tempting to compensate with a late rise in the morning. However, this could start to become routine as, by rising late, you will be less tired by bedtime, leading to further sleeplessness. Set your alarm for the same time every day and try to be disciplined in getting up when it goes off. If you are tired, this will build up *sleep pressure* during the day, making you more likely to sleep more easily at bedtime.

8. Take fewer naps

Although the effects of sleep loss can make you feel tired during the day, it is important that you try to resist the temptation to take a nap as this will make you feel less tired at bedtime. If you are feeling dangerously tired, then of course, take a short nap, but try to restrict it to just 20 minutes in order to recharge without falling into a deep sleep.

9. Keep active during the day

Remaining sedentary throughout the day means your body is not using up the energy it needs to. As a consequence, by the time you get to bed, you have unspent energy reserves which will keep you from sleeping. Make sure you stay active during the day, both physically and mentally, ensuring you burn off plenty of steam ready for sleep. However, do be sure not to exercise within 2 hours of sleep as this will cause you to be more alert and take less time to sleep.

10. Regulate your body clock with natural light

During the day, expose yourself to as much natural light as you can. Natural light suppresses the production of the sleep hormone, melatonin, making you feel more awake. Conversely, in the evening, avoid natural light, helping your body to produce melatonin and making you feel sleepy. This is easier in the winter than in the summer, when you may need to have good blinds or blackout curtains to avoid natural light entering your home late in the evening.

While these ten things can be done yourself, without the need for intervention, if you are struggling with, don't suffer in silence. At The Insomnia Clinic, we provide support and guidance to help you take back control of your sleep. To find out more, visit www.theinsomniaclinic.co.uk.