

Fostering Healthy Sleep Habits

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Duration: Variable

Frequency: Nightly

Level of Difficulty: Moderate

Overview: Getting a good night's sleep is crucial to our physical and mental health. Unfortunately for many of us, some studies show that the average American under-sleeps by as much as one hour per night. There is no magic number to the exact amount of sleep we all need as individuals; indeed, there is person-to-person variability, and the amount of sleep we need changes throughout our lifespans. Nonetheless, if you find yourself tired throughout the day, feeling sluggish, and lacking mental clarity, chances are you're not sleeping adequately.

There are a number of medical issues that can contribute to sleep problems, including things like chronic pain and sleep apnea. Those are beyond the scope of this book, and readers are encouraged to follow up with their health professionals about these sorts of issues. But for many people, sleep problems come as a result of poor habits related to sleep, and this practice is designed to address some of these common issues.

Instructions: Reflect for a moment on how you've been sleeping of late. Do you wake up feeling well rested and recharged for the coming day? Or do you find yourself feeling sluggish and fatigued? Consider how much sleep you tend to get on average each night, and whether this is adequate for your needs (for reference, visiting <https://sleepfoundation.org> can provide you with a ballpark estimate of your sleep needs at various stages of life).

If you find yourself struggling with sleep, take a moment and write down some of the effects of poor sleep that you've experienced:

Next, look over the following list of behavioral sleep strategies that can either help or hinder our ability to get a good night's sleep. You'll notice that it's broken down into a list of "do's" and "don'ts." Make note of which ones you're doing well on, as well as the ones that might be sabotaging your ability to sleep:

Do's—These habits help foster a good night's sleep	Don'ts—These may hurt your ability to sleep well at night
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep a regular sleep/wake schedule• Exercise regularly—but not within 3 hours of bedtime• Keep a comfortable sleep environment—consider temperature, bedding, lighting, etc.• Shut off all bright screens—including phones and televisions—at least 1 hour before bedtime• Establish a relaxing pre-bedtime routine—this can include things like taking a warm bath, listening to soft music, or drinking chamomile tea• Use your bed only for sleep or sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take daytime naps—these can interfere with your ability to sleep well at night• Use stimulants such as caffeine or nicotine (especially within 6 hours of bedtime)• Go to bed too hungry or too full• Exercise vigorously within 3 hours of bedtime• Drink alcohol—especially within 3 hours of bedtime• Stay in bed when you can't sleep—If you cannot fall asleep within 30 minutes, get out of bed and try a low-stimulation activity (such as reading in low light)• Watch TV in bed, eat in bed, talk on the phone in bed—these can make it harder to sleep at night• Watch the clock

How and why it works: Sleep is crucial to our well-being—there's a reason after all that we spend roughly one-third of our lives sleeping. Deficient sleep has been linked to a number of physical health problems including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes, along with a host of mental health issues including depression and anxiety. Although some sleep problems are linked to more serious health problems, much of the time simple behavioral and habit changes can lead to lasting positive improvements when it comes to our sleep.

Notes/Impressions:
