

NIH Senior Health

Built with You in Mind

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Sleep and Aging

Sleeping Well

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

A good night's sleep can make a big difference in how you feel. Here are some suggestions to help you.

- **Follow a regular schedule.** Go to sleep and wake up at the same time, even on weekends. Sticking to a regular bedtime and wake time schedule helps keep you in sync with your body's circadian clock, a 24-hour internal rhythm affected by sunlight.
- **Try not to nap too much during the day.** You might be less sleepy at night.
- **Try to exercise at regular times each day.** Exercising regularly improves the quality of your nighttime sleep and helps you sleep more soundly. Try to finish your workout at least three hours before bedtime.
- **Try to get some natural light in the afternoon each day.**
- **Be careful about what you eat.** Don't drink beverages with caffeine late in the day. Caffeine is a stimulant and can keep you awake. Also, if you like a snack before bed, a warm beverage and a few crackers may help.
- **Don't drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes to help you sleep.** Even small amounts of alcohol can make it harder to stay asleep. Smoking is dangerous for many reasons, including the hazard of falling asleep with a lit cigarette. Also, the nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant.
- **Create a safe and comfortable place to sleep.** Make sure there are locks on all doors and smoke alarms on each floor. A lamp that's easy to turn on and a phone by your bed may be helpful. The room should be dark, well ventilated, and as quiet as possible.
- **Develop a bedtime routine.** Do the same things each night to tell your body that it's time to wind down. Some people watch the evening news, read a book, or soak in a warm bath.
- **Use your bedroom only for sleeping.** After turning off the light, give yourself about 15 minutes to fall asleep. If you are still awake and not drowsy, get out of bed. When you get sleepy, go back to bed.
- **Try not to worry about your sleep.** Some people find that playing mental games is helpful. For example, think black -- a black cat on a black velvet pillow on a black corduroy sofa, etc. Or, tell yourself it's five minutes before you have to get up and you're just trying to get a few extra winks.



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If you are so tired during the day that you cannot function normally and if this lasts for more than 2 to 3 weeks, you should see your family doctor or a sleep disorders specialist.



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