

# Help Getting To Sleep

## Information Sheet



Not sleeping for long periods of time is extremely dangerous for physical and emotional wellbeing. Lack of sleep can lead to accidents, make you more likely to get sick, and is one of the primary reasons for emotional crisis, mania, or psychosis.

This information sheet was created to aid in maintaining a healthy sleep schedule.

### What is good sleep?

Everyone is different in how much sleep they need, and it can change with changing life situations. Most adults need 7-8 hours a night, but this varies by person. Teens need around 9 hours, children up to 3 years 14-16 hours. The best sleep happens when we get to bed early.

### What interferes with good sleep?

- \* *Stress, anxiety, and trauma.*
- \* *Caffeine, esp. when taken after 2pm. Caffeine is in many products not just coffee. Many teas such as green and black tea contain caffeine, as do chocolate, energy drinks, and some cold and headache medicines.*
- \* *Medication side effects. Read labels carefully.*
- \* *Poor nutrition or lack of food. You might also have food allergies that interfere with sleeping.*
- \* *Alcohol taken 2hrs before bedtime can prevent the body from reaching the deep stage of sleep necessary for the body to rejuvenate itself.*
- \* *Sugar, corn syrup, and sweeteners.*

### What helps people get to sleep?

Routine is important. Try to go to bed at the same time every night. Your body automatically will start to feel tired at this time.

Don't read or watch tv in bed. Train your body to associate your bed with sleep. If you are having a hard time, get out of bed. Turn a light on and read, or watch a movie for half an hour or so before trying to sleep in bed.

Meditation can help to relax. One method is to concentrate on watching your breath rise and fall in your belly, notice when you are distracted by thoughts, and then return to your breath.

If you missed sleep, take a short nap during the day.

Deep, slow breathing from the belly can help -- don't push or use effort, breathe naturally but deeply.

Nightmares, sometimes caused by trauma, can prevent deep sleep. Talk about the dream as soon as you awake to reaffirm what is real and what is not. If another person is not available, writing it down may help get it out of your head.

Acupuncture, including ear treatment, is extremely effective for many people to get to sleep, including people in manic states or with extreme lack of sleep. Ask to find a practitioner in your area.

Simple yoga stretches, a bath, or massage will help to relax your muscles. Visualize progressively releasing tension in each part of your body, starting with your feet all the way to your head: "My toes are relaxing...my feet are relaxing...my ankles are relaxing..."

Herbal teas (such as chamomile) can help, as can bananas. Oat straw, melatonin, passion-fruit extract, and fish oil support healthy sleep. An herbalist can guide you on what to try.

Use earplugs if your environment is loud and distracting. If you are used to noise in the background, turn on some background music such as a fan with a towel over it.

Sleeping too much can be a sign of depression, malnutrition, medication side effect, or physical illness.

Doctors prescribe benzodiazapines such as Xanax, Valium, and Ativan for sleep. These drugs can help in the short term, but are extremely addictive and in the long term can make sleep problems worse. Use them with great care, or find alternatives.

Keeping your bedroom dark and a comfortable temperature will help you get to sleep.

Physically exhausting yourself through exercise will help you get to sleep. Exercising 3-5 times a week will help your body expend excess energy and feel tired.

*DRAFT created 5-4-06 for the Common Ground Health Clinic. Send feedback and suggestions to: [will@freedom-center.org](mailto:will@freedom-center.org).*