

If you have any questions, ask your care team.

Good Sleep Habits

Sleep is an important factor in how your body and mind work. When you do not get enough quality sleep, your body can be in a state of stress. When your body is under stress, you are more likely to feel hungrier, you have less energy to follow through with health habits.

Not getting enough sleep can increase ghrelin, which is a hormone that signals your brain that you are hungry and decreases feelings of fullness. It is known as a “hunger hormone.” There are many ways not getting enough sleep may affect your eating habits, including:

- Whether you feel full and satisfied after you eat
- Your hunger cues
- The choices you make with food

Sleep disturbances can affect your quality of sleep. Let your physician know if you have (or have been told you have) these symptoms:

- Pauses of breathing, choking or gasping in your sleep
- Loud snoring
- Discomfort in your legs or arms that makes it hard to fall asleep
- Sleep walking
- Daytime sleepiness

It is important to practice good sleep habits and create healthy sleep patterns. Poor sleep habits are linked to overeating, less physical activity and obesity.

Improving sleep

Changing your behavior around sleeping is one of the best ways to treat sleep problems. Unhealthy sleep habits might affect your body’s circadian rhythm (daily biological clock).

Your body’s circadian rhythm helps regulate your sleep cycle. It also influences your eating habits and digestion. So, following your circadian rhythm can have both an indirect and direct effect on managing your weight and health habits.

There are behavioral strategies that can help you reset your circadian rhythm.

Natural sleep patterns

Our bodies are meant to be in a rhythm of energy that is about 16 hours alert and 8 hours at rest. It matches the daytime and nighttime hours for most of the world.

This cycle was easy to follow before things like a light bulb. In the past, once it was dark, it was very dark, and activity was hard for humans at night. Once we harnessed electricity and produced light, the environment changed a lot. We can now be in a fully lit environment doing any kind of activity 24 hours a day. This disrupts the body's natural rhythm. Once it is off track it can stay that way for a long time.

The good news is our bodies **want** to reset themselves back to the 16-hour alert and 8-hour at rest cycle.

Rules for sleep

Rules to change sleep behavior help this process. You will need to follow them closely to see results.

Set a regular wake up time and stick to it. The best way to get your body in a regular rhythm is to first, not focus on bedtime. Instead focus on waking up at the same time every day. This starts that biological clock at the same time each day. That is key to getting it back in rhythm. If your wake-up time is the same each day, you will then start to get sleepy at the same time in the evening. However, be prepared for this to take 2 to 3 days. It also means that if the alarm goes off at your set wake up time and you only got 2 hours of sleep, you still get up. Sleeping in will keep the rhythm disrupted and reinforce poor sleep cycles. Also, the sleep pressure you will feel from not getting enough sleep will be helpful for making it easier to fall asleep at the right time the next night.

Do not take naps. This is only for the phase when you are trying to reset the body clock to a healthy sleep cycle. If you are in a good sleep cycle, a nice 20-minute nap is good for you. However, if you had a sleepless night and you take a 2-hour nap, this keeps the body clock in a disrupted cycle. It may result in not being sleepy later that evening because of that nap.

Only go to bed when you are sleepy. Often people try to force a bedtime. This is a bad idea if you are not tired when that bedtime comes. This may lead to being awake and restless in bed. The more time we spend awake in bed, the more it makes a link in the brain of restlessness and wakefulness to bed. It is important to break that connection. Do not go to bed unless you are sleepy. We want the brain to associate laying down and pulling up the covers with falling quickly asleep. Lying awake in bed creates the opposite connection. Instead of focusing on falling asleep at a certain time, make a goal to just begin winding down at a certain time.

Create a protected sleep routine. Make a routine that prioritizes sleep because it is one of the most important things for your health and well-being. Take your wake-up time and subtract 9 hours. Make that the time you get ready for bed. For instance, if your wake-up time is 6 am, that means you start your bedtime routine at 9 pm. That does not necessarily mean you go to bed at that time.

Even if you are not tired, make this the time you start to get ready for bed. It is a behavioral cue that lets your body know that 15 hours of being awake is enough and it is time to wind down.

The following tips can help you create a healthy sleep routine:

- Put your phone away.
- Stop checking email, reading the news, and using social media.
- Stop doing any active or stimulating tasks and do something quiet instead.
- Read for pleasure. A rule of thumb is to choose something that is not too stimulating, but not too boring (a little boring is good).
- Brush your teeth and wash your face.
- Put on your sleep clothes.
- Drink some decaffeinated tea.
- Talk to your loved ones.

As you get sleepy, all you will need to do is get up and go to bed. You have already brushed your teeth, put on your sleep clothes and washed your face. If you have not done that, there can be a thought of “I don’t feel like getting up and getting ready for bed”. So you might stay on the couch and perhaps, worse yet, fall asleep on it. Or you may find yourself waking up to go through the routine, making it harder to fall asleep.

It is very helpful to get ready for bed before you are ready to sleep. It is a cue to relax and to be ready as soon as sleepiness comes.

Use the 15- to 20-minute rule. You cannot force sleep. It is not possible to “make” yourself fall asleep. It either overtakes you or it does not. Sleep is just something that comes without making it happen. If it has not happened within 15 to 20 minutes after laying down, chances are it is not happening anytime soon. Many people report that they are very tired when they go to bed and then suddenly, they are awake, tossing and turning. This is because they have spent hours in the bed awake and thinking about it. Staying in bed any longer works to create that connection of bed and wakefulness. You need to break this connection.

If you are not asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, physically get out of the bed. Go to a comfortable chair with a soft light. Have some neutral things to focus on. That could be things like a word search, reading something non-stimulating. Try to use paper and pencil and not a lit screen as looking into light disrupts sleep. As soon as you feel your eyelids getting droopy, simply get up and go back to bed. Repeat this as many times as needed until you fall asleep.

Tips for sleeping better

There are other behavioral strategies to keep in mind that can help promote good sleep patterns. The above strategies are important for resetting the body clock, but these are good behavioral tips to promote sleep as well.

Things to avoid

- Avoid drinking caffeine after 12 pm. Caffeine is a stimulant. It can make it hard to fall and stay asleep.
- Avoid using nicotine within 4 to 6 hours of bedtime. Nicotine, like caffeine, is a stimulant that can make falling and staying asleep hard.
- Avoid drinking alcohol within 2 hours of bedtime. At first you may feel sleepy after drinking alcohol, but alcohol use near bedtime usually leads to an increase in awake time during the night.
- Avoid eating heavy meals within 2 hours of bedtime. Eating a heavy meal close to bedtime puts a strain on your digestive system while you are trying to sleep.
- Avoid drinking liquids before bedtime. Drinking liquids close to bedtime will fill your bladder. This will cause discomfort while you sleep and make you wake more often during the night.

Things that could help you sleep

- Help your body get to the right temperature for sleep.
 - Take a hot bath before bed. When you get out of the bath, your body temperature drops rapidly. As your core temperature cools down, you become sleepy.
 - Keep the room temperature cool.
 - Warm up your feet. Place a hot water bottle at your feet to help the rest of your body cool down.
- Make sure your room is dark and quiet at night. You may need to use heavy curtains to block light from the outside.
- Do not go to bed too hungry or too full.
- Do not overthink or worry at bedtime. Write down your thoughts or worries to address in the morning.
- Use relaxation techniques at night and during the day. The more relaxed you are, the easier it will be to fall asleep.
- If you are a light sleeper, use a sound machine or a fan to drown out noises that may keep you awake.

Your care team is here to support you on your journey to better sleep habits. If you have any questions about sleep habits, please ask your physician.