

# Guide to a Good Night's Sleep

From an article by Dr. Joseph Mercola

*[with comments by Brenda Frandsen]*

If you are having sleep problems, whether you are not able to fall asleep, wake up too often, don't feel well-rested when you wake up in the morning, or simply want to improve the quality and quantity of your sleep, try as many of the following techniques below as possible:

- **Listen to White Noise or Relaxation CDs.** Some people find the sound of white noise or nature sounds, such as the ocean or forest, to be soothing for sleep. *[Personally, I prefer the noise of a Hamilton Beach Air Purifier.]*
- **Avoid before-bed snacks, particularly grains and sugars.** This will raise blood sugar and inhibit sleep. Later, when blood sugar drops too low (hypoglycemia), you might wake up and not be able to fall back asleep.
- **Sleep in complete darkness or as close as possible.** When light hits the eyes, it disrupts the circadian rhythm of the pineal gland and production of melatonin and serotonin. There also should be as little light in the bathroom as possible if you get up in the middle of the night.
- **No TV right before bed.** It is too stimulating to the brain and it will take longer to fall asleep. It is also disruptive of pineal gland function for the same reason as above. *[Personally, I find that watching TV helps me fall asleep---but avoid "action thrillers"!]*
- **Wear socks to bed.** Due to the fact that they have the poorest circulation, the feet often feel cold before the rest of the body. A study has shown that this reduces night wakings. *[The new soft socks that are sold in Dillard's, Costco, etc. are especially nice to sleep in during winter months.]*
- **Read something spiritual or religious.** This will help to relax. Don't read anything stimulating, such as a mystery or suspense novel, as this may have the opposite effect. In addition, if you are really enjoying a suspenseful book, you might wind up unintentionally reading for hours, instead of going to sleep.
- **Use an alarm clock** if you have to wake up at a particular time so you won't lie awake worrying about not waking up on time. There are new "Sun Alarm Clocks" available that do not make a noise, but gradually lighten up the room so you awake without being startled.
- **Journaling.** If you often lay in bed with your mind racing, it might be helpful to keep a journal and write down your thoughts before bed. *[If you are worried about things you need to do the next day, make a list before bed so you don't have to lie there and try to remember all that stuff. Once you have written it down, you can put it out of your mind!]*
- **Melatonin and its precursors.** If behavioral changes do not work, it may be possible to improve sleep by supplementing with the hormone melatonin. However, exercise extreme caution in using it, and use it only as a last resort, as it is a powerful hormone. Ideally, it is best to increase levels naturally with exposure to bright sunlight in the daytime (along with full spectrum fluorescent bulbs in the winter) and absolute complete darkness at night. One should get blackout drapes so no light is coming in from the outside. One can also use one of melatonin's precursors, L-tryptophan or 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP). L-tryptophan is the safest and Dr. Mercola's preference, but it must be obtained by prescription only.
- **Get to bed as early as possible.** Our systems, particularly the adrenals, do a majority of their recharging or recovering during the hours between 11PM and 1AM. In addition, your gallbladder dumps toxins during this same period. If you are awake, the toxins back up into the liver which then secondarily back up into your entire system and cause further disruption of your health. Prior to the widespread use of electricity, people would go to bed shortly after sundown, as most animals do, and which nature intended for humans as well.

- **Keep the temperature in the bedroom no higher than 70 degrees F.** Many people keep their homes and particularly the upstairs bedrooms too hot. *[I keep my bedroom (during the winter) at 62 degrees. In the summer, I adjust the temperature up to 78 to keep the electricity bills down, but sleep with a fan and few covers.]*
- **Eat a high-protein snack several hours before bed.** This can provide the L-tryptophan needed to produce melatonin and serotonin.
- **Also eat a small piece of fruit.** This can help the L-tryptophan cross the blood-brain barrier.
- **Reduce or avoid as many drugs as possible.** Many medications, both prescription and over-the-counter may have effects on sleep. I
- **Avoid caffeine.** A recent study showed that in some people, caffeine is not metabolized efficiently and therefore they can feel the effects long after consuming it. So, an afternoon cup of coffee (or even tea) will keep some people from falling asleep. Also, some medications, particularly diet pills, contain caffeine.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Although alcohol will make people drowsy, the effect is short lived and people will often wake up several hours later, unable to fall back asleep. Alcohol will also keep you from falling into the deeper stages of sleep, where the body does most of its healing.
- **Lose weight.** Being overweight can increase the risk of sleep apnea, which will prevent a restful night's sleep. *[I recommend Dr. St. Amand's hypoglycemic (low carbohydrate) diet for weight loss.]*
- **Avoid foods that you may be sensitive to.** This is particularly true for dairy and wheat products, as they may have effect on sleep, such as causing apnea, excess congestion, gastrointestinal upset, and gas, among others.
- **Don't drink a lot of fluids within 2 hours of going to bed.** This will reduce the likelihood of needing to get up and go to the bathroom or at least minimize the frequency. *[Most fibromyalgics will awaken in the night suffering from thirst. Be sure to keep a large glass of water within easy reach so you do not have to get out of bed to get a drink!]*
- **Take a hot bath, shower or sauna before bed.** When body temperature is raised in the late evening, it will fall at bedtime, facilitating sleep.
- **Remove the clock from view.** It will only add to your worry when constantly staring at it... 2 AM...3 AM... 4:30 AM...
- **Keep Your Bed For Sleeping.** If you are used to watching TV or doing work in bed, you may find it harder to relax and to think of the bed as a place to sleep. *[I find that watching TV in bed actually helps me relax and go to sleep, as does reading a book.]*
- **If you are menopausal or perimenopausal,** the hormonal changes at this time may cause problems, if not properly addressed. *[With the recent studies that implicate Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) with cancer and heart disease, you may want to discuss your problems with a naturopathic physician.]*
- **Don't Change Your Bedtime.** You should go to bed, and wake up, at the same times each day, even on the weekends. This will help your body to get into a sleep rhythm and make it easier to fall asleep and get up in the morning.
- **Get Daily Exercise.** Exercising for at least 30 minutes every day can help you fall asleep, however, don't exercise too close to bedtime or it may keep you awake. Try exercising in the morning, afternoon or early evening instead.