

10 Tips for Sleeping Well

Our ability to enjoy good quality sleep is one of the ultimate indicators of balance in our lives. Poor sleep is a risk factor for a multitude of health conditions, including obesity, breast cancer, depression, and heart disease. Sleep problems have many contributing factors and the underlying cause may take some time to resolve. However, these tips are an important first step and might be all that you need to achieve a good night's sleep.

1. Get your circadian rhythm on track:

- a. Keep your bedroom *entirely* dark. Even the light from an alarm clock can reduce your body's production of the essential sleep hormone melatonin.
- b. Enjoy at least 20 minutes of full-spectrum light *every morning* to stimulate daytime hormones.
- c. Keep a routine to train your body to secrete hormones at appropriate times of the day. This includes waking, exercising, eating, and sleeping at the same time every day.

2. Address body temperature: This often means keeping your bedroom at 60 to 67°F (or 15 to 19°C).

- a. Keep your core cool. An overall *drop* in body temperature is required to induce sleep so some people benefit from avoiding hot baths and keeping the bedroom cool.
- b. Keep your feet warm. The body dilates blood vessels in the feet to draw blood away from the core. Warming your feet with a hot water bottle at bedtime induces sleep extremely well for some people!

3. Reduce exposure to electromagnetic radiation (EMR). This includes keeping your cell phone out of your bedroom and avoiding electric blankets. Research in the field of EMR and health is exploding.

4. Watch your blood sugar. Blood sugar crashes in the middle of the night can send surges of stress hormones that cause night-time waking – particularly between 1 and 3am. If this is your problem, have a small amount of protein before bed, such as a few walnuts. Avoid alcohol, sugar, and caffeine.

5. Manage stress! If difficult emotions are not managed during the day, they can impair your sleep. Use exercise, mindfulness, counselling, or botanicals, to improve emotional resiliency and stress management. Naturopathic Doctors are well equipped to help you buffer the impact of stress on your body.

6. Relax your muscles. Tense muscles tell the brain that you're in danger. Try light stretching, a massage, magnesium supplementation, or focusing on relaxing areas of tension with your mind.

7. Activate the parasympathetic ("rest and digest") state of the body:

- a. Avoid intense exercise, reading, or television before bed.
- b. Learn breathing exercises or meditation practices that shift the body to its parasympathetic state.
- c. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine (e.g. green tea, chocolate), and cold or headache medications. These can take up to 14 hours to be eliminated from the body.

8. Avoid chronic use of pharmaceutical sleeping pills. Even the "non-addictive" ones can impair your body's ability to repair at night and enable the underlying cause of your insomnia to progress.

9. Upgrade old mattresses. People without latex allergies may benefit from a natural rubber latex mattress (*not* memory foam) that omits the metal springs and volatile fumes.

10. Track your sleep for 1 week – You might be getting more sleep than you thought!

If you've addressed all these points and *still* aren't sleeping, ask your ND about sleep training technology like Heartmath, contributing health conditions like sleep apnea and thyroid conditions, or natural sleep aids that support rather than inhibit recovery of restful sleep.