

10 Tips for a Good Night's Sleep

1. **Keep consistent bedtimes and wake times seven days a week** (even after a “bad” night).
2. You should stay in bed equal only to the number of hours of sleep you are achieving per night (for example, if you are getting six hours of sleep per night, you should plan bedtime and wake time as six hours apart). **Many insomniacs spend far too much time in bed**, attempting to “squeeze” out a few more minutes of sleep.
3. If you have difficulty getting to sleep within 20 minutes, **get out of bed** and do something relaxing and distracting. For many people, this is reading. **Do not do housework, bills, work, or anything that is too stimulating within two hours of bedtime or during a nighttime awakening.**
4. Although some people’s insomnia is helped by a **nap** at midday, for most it **will interfere with falling asleep that night.**
5. **Avoid alcohol** within five hours of bedtime. Alcohol is a poor hypnotic and causes nighttime awakenings.
6. **Avoid caffeine** (coffee, tea, soda, chocolate) after noon. Even if it doesn’t prevent you from falling asleep, it can cause shallow sleep or nighttime awakenings.
7. **Avoid** going to bed on either an **empty stomach or a full stomach**. A light snack may be of value.
8. **Bedrooms should be quiet, safe, and relaxing.** Clocks should face away from the bed, so as not to “count down” the minutes until morning.
9. **Daily exercise** will improve insomnia, although the effects may not be immediate.
10. **Schedule “worry time”** earlier in the day, so as to consider the day’s problems and find some resolution **before** getting into bed.

John Winkelman, MD, PhD
Medical Director, Sleep Health Center
Brigham and Women’s Hospital
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Harvard Medical School