

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR BETTER SLEEP

*Violation of which may
doom you to insomnia hell!*



1. Try to maintain a regular sleep schedule by getting up at the same time every morning and avoiding sleeping in weekends beyond one extra hour. This practice will “anchor” your sleep schedule and become the foundation for your new and reconditioned sleep;
2. Develop a 30 minute pre-sleep routine for mind and body to wind down from the stress and activity of the day. Reduce mental, physical and sensory (light and noise) stimulation. Soothing music, relaxation and meditation exercises, or pleasure reading may be helpful. Avoid bright light all evening and melatonin-blocking blue light from computer and television displays for at least 30 minutes preceding bedtime;
3. Bed should be used only for sleep. Any other activity weakens the association of bed with sleep. Ideally, this means no television, computer, texting or talking on the phone, home or office work, and no eating, drinking or even sex (*ideally*) in the bed or bedroom. A quiet, darkened, cool ($\leq 68^{\circ}\text{F}.$) yet comfortable room that feels safe is very important;
4. Bed partners and pets may seem to promote a sense of comfort and well being, however, they may also contribute to shallow and disturbed sleep by causing frequent awakenings that are not remembered. Decide what is truly best for your sleep and health;
5. A 30 to 45 minute dose of early morning light is vital to maintaining your natural sleep/wake (circadian) rhythm and promoting sleep readiness 16 hours later. Walking the dog, doing outside chores and exercise, eating breakfast by a window or ample artificial light exposure may help satisfy this need for morning light stimulation before 9 am;
6. Regular exercise is essential for optimal health and well being including sound sleep. Exercising 3 to 6 hours before bedtime is optimal for relaxation and lowering of body core temperature to promote sleep as is a hot bath approximately 1-2 hours before sleep;
7. Eating and drinking close to bedtime can interfere with falling and staying asleep but so can hunger. A light snack of complex carbohydrates is fine if hungry before bedtime or during the night. Avoid stimulants like sugar, high fructose corn syrup and nicotine, especially later in the day, and try to limit liquids to one cup within 4 hours of bedtime;
8. The clinical effects of caffeine generally last from 4-6 hours and longer for some people who are especially sensitive. Generally, the last consumption should be at least six hours before bedtime. Alcohol close to bedtime actually lowers melatonin production, increases adrenaline and disrupts sleep throughout the night. OTC sleep aids, prescribed medication and supplements are no substitute for these sleep hygiene recommendations;
9. Do not watch the clock during the night. Remove or turn the clock(s) around so that you can not tell the time. Set the alarm to quell any fear of over sleeping and to ensure your regular sleep schedule. Estimate your time awake for the Sleep Efficiency Form;
10. Napping correctly can be very healthful but *only* after having successfully used these and other behavioral techniques to recondition your sleep. A 20-40 minute nap about half way through the day will then be refreshing without damaging your sleep at night.