



## Southern California Pulmonary & Sleep Disorders Medical Center

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# RULES FOR A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP

- 1. Go to bed only when you are sleepy, not at a predetermined time.** If you are not sleepy (yawning, heavy eyelids, difficulty with thinking or concentrating, head bobbing or intermittently dozing) then do something relaxing such as reading, listening to music or watching something boring on television. Try to relax your body and distract your mind.
- 2. Try to arise at the same time each day, weekends included.** Do this even if you went to bed later than usual the prior night. You may be a little sleepier the next day. But it will make it easier to fall asleep at your desired bedtime the following night.
- 3. Try to have a “quiet time” of at least 30-60 minutes before your desired bedtime.** This means stop playing video games or doing work, answering your emails or other intensive activities on the computer, or watching exciting TV shows or movies right up until bedtime. Brush your teeth, wash your face and complete your pre-bedtime routine at least 30-60 minutes prior to your desired bedtime. **You need to “cool down” your brain before you get into bed.**
- 4. Your quiet time should be performed in low level lighting.** Bright light can suppress your brain from secreting Melatonin, your body's natural sleeping aid.
- 5. To help disassociate wakefulness from the bed and bedroom environment, the bedroom should be used for sleep and sexual activity only.** Any activity that can be considered a wake time activity should be done in a room other than the bedroom. Activities such as reading, watching TV, talking on the phone, heated arguments or long discussions, reading your emails, doing the bills or doing work in bed are to be discouraged. **Do them in another room and be done with them at least an hour before your desired bedtime.**
- 6. If sexual activity tends to be arousing rather than sedating, it should occur at a time other than right before bedtime or in another setting other than the bedroom.**
- 7. If you tend to watch the clock, turn it around so you can't see it.** You may leave it in the room for its alarm function, but turn it around so you cannot watch the hands of the clock go around. There is nothing more anxiety provoking to the insomnia patient than knowing another hour has passed without sleep.
- 8. If you tend to have a wandering mind,** several hours before bedtime, keep a diary. Write down things that stressed you out today or upcoming events that you may be concerned about. Write down your thoughts. Write out a solution. Try to clear your mind of these concerns so you will be less likely to think about them when you should be sleeping.
- 9. Assuming that you waited until you were sleepy before you got into bed, if you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes, don't stay in bed and try harder to fall asleep. GET OUT OF BED, go into another room and do something relaxing until you are sleepy and ready to fall asleep. Then you may return to bed.**
- 10. Try to keep a regular schedule.** Being consistent with your daily activities such as meals, work / school activities, household chores, etc. tends to strengthen your body's “internal clock”.
- 11. Exercise regularly. Aerobic exercise performed 4-6 hours before your desired bedtime may help you fall asleep.** Exercise done closer to your desired bedtime may cause difficulty falling asleep. Exercise done in the morning may have no effect upon your sleep but will still improve your general health and well being.
- 12. Avoid caffeine within 6 hours of bedtime.** Caffeine may be found in coffee, tea, cola and chocolates.
- 13. Avoid tobacco products within 4-6 hours before bedtime.** Nicotine can act as a stimulant.
- 14. Do not use alcohol within 4-6 hours of your desired bedtime and never use alcohol as a sleeping aid.** While alcohol may make you feel sleepy, the sleep that follows is fragmented and generally not refreshing.
- 15. Try to avoid daytime napping** as this may interfere with your ability to fall asleep at night. If you must nap, try to limit napping to 30-60 minutes. Never nap within 6-8 hours of your desired bedtime.
- 16. Don't go to bed hungry.** Hunger may disturb sleep. A light snack may help. On the other hand, a large meal too close to bedtime may disturb sleep by causing heartburn or reflux symptoms.
- 17. Try to limit nighttime noise within your bedroom environment.** If nighttime noise (from another room in your home or from outside your home (such as neighbors or your own pets), disturbs your sleep, **use ear plugs or white noise to block out disturbing sounds.** Pets jumping or moving around on your bed is a common cause of sleep disruption. If your bedmate is a snorer, have he or she see a sleep specialist to address their snoring or possible sleep apnea. You will both sleep better.
- 18. A dark, quiet and cool bedroom environment is conducive to promoting sleep.** Consider the use of drapes or window shades to keep out light. Adjust your thermostat to a comfortable temperature. Get those pets out of the bedroom.
- 19. Chronic use of sleeping pills (whether prescription or over-the-counter) is frequently ineffective in most cases of insomnia.** If you find yourself needing more than the occasional use of a sleeping pill, you should see a sleep specialist to investigate and treat the underlying cause of your insomnia.