

Sleep Hygiene

If you are having problems with insomnia, these simple rules need to be followed to help you with your insomnia. These are not overnight cures, but rather changing behaviors that will improve your sleep over time. Sometimes these steps have to be done daily for several months up to a year before you can see results, but if you follow them, you will see results.

Rule # 1:

You should wake up at the same time every morning, while allowing for 30 minutes extra sleep in time on weekends.

This is important to keep the sleep-wake cycle consistent.

Rule #2:

Eight hours before wake-up time is bedroom time, but not quite bedtime.

People who have insomnia need to prepare for sleep in order to avoid “fearing bedtime”. People with insomnia should clear their minds by sitting in a bedside chair, but not in the bed. This is a time to calm down and help slow down racing thoughts in the brain. If you have a lot of thoughts running through your mind at bedtime, you will not be able to sleep until you can get those thoughts to slow down and stop. Sometimes people need to write down the thoughts onto a paper in order to train the brain to save them until the morning.

Next, it is time to turn off the lights and relax to music (without words), meditation, and/or prayer. Only after you've started to become sleepy should you get into bed. You can take sleep medications, if needed, during this time. Sleep medications to avoid include all over-the-counter medications except melatonin. Most over-the-counter sleep medications actually cause worsening insomnia, weight gain, memory loss, and worsening brain function. Alcohol and benzodiazepines (Valium, Xanax, Ativan, etc) also disrupt the sleep cycle and should be avoided.

Rule #3:

Only Two Things Should Happen In Bed – Sleep and Intimacy.

You are trying to retrain your brain to sleep when in the bed. No negative issues should occur in bed – such as arguments/disagreements/planning the next day. You should not read books or watch TV in bed. When you do this, you are training your brain that the bed is not for sleeping, which worsens insomnia.

If you cannot sleep after 10-20 minutes, you should get out of bed and sit back in the bedside chair.

Rule #4:

NO NAPPING!!!

Sleep that occurs between the time you wake up and bedtime is considered napping. Napping further disrupts the sleep-wake cycle and continues the cycle of insomnia. For a select few patients with certain medical conditions, sometimes a nap is needed during the day – in which case a 30 minute nap after lunch is OK.