

# 41 Tips for Restful Sleep and Good Health

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## **Why Restful Sleep Equals Good Health**

Sleep is when the body repairs itself, replaces old cells with new ones, and gathers energy for the day ahead. Although each person's sleep needs vary, the average adult needs about 8 hours and gets less than 7.

More than 100 million Americans fail to get a good night's sleep. About 40 million Americans have sleep disorders, of which 95% go *undiagnosed* and, therefore, go *untreated*.

If you do not get enough sleep, you will build up sleep debt. This sleep debt continues to grow as you accumulate more and more hours of missed sleep time. In addition to affecting your alertness and physical abilities, lack of sleep and increasing sleep debt may cause some of the following.

- Heart attack, stroke, and associated death
- Workplace and automobile accidents
- Decreased immune function and risk of infections
- Memory loss
- Impaired learning
- Sexual problems
- Heartburn and indigestion
- Problems with mental function

A good night's sleep is essential, therefore, for good health. Lack of sleep may cause serious illnesses as well as death. As you will see in this booklet, you need to be aware of how your sleep habits, diet, and surrounding environment can affect your sleep. We will also make you aware of two very common sleep disorders, insomnia and sleep apnea, which can have a very negative effect on your sleep and your health.

## **Useful Sleep Habits**

**1. Determine what your ideal sleep needs are.** Although the average adult needs 8 hours of sleep, individual needs vary from 5 to 10 hours. If you are sleepy during the daytime, adjust your bedtime and wake-up times accordingly to find the ideal number

of hours you need. The "right" amount of sleep is whatever produces daytime alertness and a feeling of well-being.

**2. Maintain regular bedtime and wake-up times.** Lack of daytime sleepiness is a sign that you are choosing a bedtime suited to you. Maintain this regular schedule even on weekends and days off work.

**3. Exercise regularly, especially in the morning.** Avoid, however, heavy exercise 4 or fewer hours before bedtime. The body releases adrenaline that energizes it, thus hindering sleep.

**4. Make love before bedtime.** Making love releases endorphins, which will make you relaxed and therefore help you to fall asleep quickly.

**5. Limit daytime naps.** If you have daytime sleepiness, do not nap more than an hour. A power nap of 20 minutes may be sufficient anytime between the hours of 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.

**6. Use the bedroom only for sleep and making love.** Avoid using your bedroom to watch TV, do office work, or read scary stories, as the mind will associate your bedroom with these activities; this association will make it more difficult to fall asleep at bedtime. Avoid allowing pets to sleep with you.

### **Sleep and Your Diet**

Your diet can have a significant effect on your sleep patterns. It is important to be aware of your dietary intake during the day and how it might affect your sleep. Consider the following guidelines.

**7. Avoid caffeine.** Especially 6 hours or less before bedtime. Caffeine (found in coffee, chocolate, tea, colas, and some drugs) stimulates the brain and interferes with sleep. Although moderate use during the day may not affect your sleep, heavy use (e.g., more than 6 cups of coffee) may lead to nighttime awakening.

**8. Avoid alcohol 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.** If consumed within 6 hours of bedtime, alcohol may

help induce sleep, but your sleep will be disrupted later at night; you might also end up with morning headaches.

**9. Avoid cigarettes before bedtime.** If you have to smoke, don't do it fewer than 4–6 hours before bedtime. High levels of nicotine cause arousal and agitation, which hinder sleep.

**10. Don't eat a full meal too close to bedtime.** If you do, it will interfere with your ability to sleep. A balanced meal of proteins and complex carbohydrates about 4 hours before bedtime is ideal.

**11. Eat a light bedtime snack.** A light bedtime snack consisting of complex carbohydrates such as whole grain muffins or crackers along with milk may have a sedating effect. Milk has tryptophan, a naturally occurring substance which the brain converts into serotonin (a sleep-inducing chemical). Other tryptophan containing foods are bananas, turkey, grain crackers, and peanut butter.

**12. Avoid beverages just before bedtime.** This will reduce the urge to urinate after going to sleep. It takes the body about 90 minutes to process liquid through its system. If you do have beverages, make sure you allow your body sufficient time to process them before bedtime.

**13. Get an adequate intake of minerals and vitamins.** A regular intake of vitamins and minerals such as magnesium and calcium may help you to sleep better as they are natural relaxants. In addition to possibly helping you sleep, vitamins have other well-known health benefits—another reason to take them on a regular basis.

### **Your Sleep Environment**

Everything that you use during sleep and that surrounds you during sleep makes up your sleep environment. Follow these guidelines to ensure a proper sleep environment.

**14. Choose a good quality mattress.** Your size, comfort level, and health conditions will determine the type of mattress you choose, whether it is a standard coil mattress, foam mattress, or waterbed. If you have back problems, get a firm mattress.

**15. Use quality pillows and comfortable sheets and blankets.** You can choose from soft, firm, foam, or feather pillows, depending on your preference. If you have neck, back, or sleep apnea problems, contour pillows may be more suitable for you. If you have allergies, you may want to use foam or urethane pillows for their washability. Sheets and blankets come in various fabrics, from cottons to luxurious silks. Choose a quality fabric.

**16. Maintain adequate bedroom temperature and humidity.** In order to prevent your nose and throat from becoming dry, your bedroom humidity should be between 60 and 70 percent all year round. Use a good quality humidifier, especially in winter when the air is drier. Ideal bedroom temperature is between 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

**17. Assess noise level in your bedroom.** While loud, extraneous noises can clearly affect the quality of your sleep, for light sleepers even a ringing phone, a ticking bedroom clock, or an alarm radio can be highly disturbing. The steady, low sound of a fan or a white noise machine might help to muffle extraneous sounds. Earplugs, available in drug-stores, might also help.

**18. Minimize light in your bedroom.** If light is affecting your sleep, you may want to use black-out shades. These are heavy, opaque shades that darken a room. A night mask is another good solution. Especially if you work night shifts and need daytime sleep, these are important solutions to consider.

## **Insomnia**

About 1 in 3 Americans have insomnia, which is difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. As noted



earlier, lack of consistent good sleep due to insomnia may have very negative health consequences. Insomnia is classified into three types:

- *Transient insomnia* is when you can't sleep well for a few nights, a condition which might be caused by short-term stress or excitement.
- *Short-term insomnia* is when you experience poor sleep for 4 weeks to 6 months. This may happen because of medical or psychiatric problems.
- *Chronic insomnia* is when you sleep poorly every night or most nights for more than 6 months.

To combat insomnia, consider the following tips.

**19. Consider medical causes of insomnia.** While the suggestions earlier in this booklet may improve your sleep, poor sleep will not normalize if you have an underlying medical condition (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, chronic pain) that has insomnia as a secondary effect. You need to determine, therefore, if you have an associated medical condition.

**20. Determine whether you have heartburn.** Heartburn, especially if it occurs while you sleep, may lead to nighttime awakenings, thereby causing fragmented sleep. Consult your physician if you are having such problems. Highly effective medications exist to control heartburn.

**21. Assess whether your existing medication use is causing poor sleep.** A number of popular medications contain caffeine, which can cause poor sleep. Check the package insert of the medication and ask your doctor about how to adjust dosing schedules so your sleep is not affected.

**22. Assess the level of stress in your life.** If you have ruled out drug and medical causes of insomnia, assess the level of stress in your life that might be coming from relationship or career problems. Seek appropriate counseling so you can take charge of your life as well as gain a broader outlook on it.

**23. Use relaxation techniques to reduce stress levels.** For short-term or chronic insomnia, a number of relaxation techniques such as transcendental meditation, biofeedback therapy, or yoga might help.

**24. Determine whether your sleeping habits, sleep environment, and diet are causing insomnia.** Any of these factors could cause poor sleep. If you follow the suggestions outlined earlier in the booklet, you might be able to improve your sleep, especially if you have transient insomnia.

**25. Assess your irritation and anger levels and how you manage these feelings.** Not effectively managing your anger can lead to insomnia. Scientific studies have shown that inappropriate anger management is associated with a host of other ailments such as heart disease, depression, and cancer. Look in the back of this booklet for resources to help you.

**26. Determine whether your insomnia is associated with symptoms of depression.** Insomnia is a common symptom of depression. Other symptoms include feelings of suppressed anger, low self-esteem, and hopelessness. Depression is also sometimes associated with excessive sleepiness. If you have any of these symptoms, consult your physician.

**27. Determine your anxiety level and its effect on your sleep.** Chronic insomnia is often associated with excessive anxiety and worry. One way to beat worrying thoughts is to get your thoughts focused on the present moment. Meditation techniques that focus on repeating a word are especially effective. See the Further Reading section in the back of this booklet for a text designed to help you incorporate meditation into your daily routine and get back into present-moment awareness.

**28. Ask your physician about sleeping medications.** There are many types of sleeping medications. Some are “long-acting” which help to maintain sleep in the middle of the night. The “short-acting” ones

help you to fall asleep quickly. Consult with your physician to find which type of medication is right for you and for how long it should be used.

## **29. Determine if insomnia is due to sleep apnea.**

It is possible that you might mistake insomnia for a sleep-related breathing disorder known as sleep apnea. Sleep apnea may cause repeated pauses in breathing during sleeping for as short as even 10 seconds. See below for a more detailed discussion of sleep apnea.

### **Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea occurs when the muscles in your throat relax during deep sleep, causing airflow to be blocked. The blood oxygen level drops, which causes the brain to wake up. This cycle repeats itself sometimes hundreds of times a night. Untreated sleep apnea may result in:

- Heart attacks
- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Impotence
- Loss of interest in sex
- Menstrual irregularities
- Depression

Some of the *signs and symptoms* of sleep apnea are:

- Excessive sleepiness during the day, especially when you are driving or reading
- Morning headaches
- Irritability, anger, depression, and difficulty concentrating on work
- Very loud snoring
- Snoring patterns with gasps and pauses, which reveal that your breathing is stopping and restarting
- It is estimated that about half of all people with high blood pressure and heart disease also suffer from sleep apnea

If you have any of the above symptoms, consult your physician. If you are diagnosed with sleep apnea, your physician might suggest lifestyle changes. If they don't work, specific medical therapies may be needed. Some tips to lessen the effects of sleep apnea are:

**30. Sleep on your side.** Some people have sleep apnea only when laying on their backs. When you do this, gravity pulls at the soft muscles at the back of your throat, causing your air pipe to narrow or close off completely. A tennis ball placed in a pocket sewn onto the back of your pajamas will force you to sleep on your side. Or you might lay on your side and put pillows behind your back to help prop you up.

**31. Avoid alcohol before bedtime.** Alcohol makes throat muscles relax, and may make your apnea worse by increasing its frequency and severity. Even 1 glass of wine can do this. Avoid alcohol for 4–6 hours before bedtime.

**32. Exercise and lose weight.** If you are overweight, losing weight may improve your overall breathing and sleep apnea. Even a 10 or 20 percent reduction in weight may lessen apnea symptoms.

**33. Take drugs with care.** Sedatives such as sleeping pills, anti-anxiety drugs, and some pain medications may make the muscles in your throat relax. When this happens, your air pipes will narrow, thus making your apnea worse. Consult your physician if you are taking medications and have symptoms of apnea.

**34. Stop smoking.** Recent studies have suggested that smoking may actually make your apnea worse. Quitting smoking will improve your breathing and enable you to sleep better. Talk to your physician regarding effective ways to stop smoking.

**35. Get medical therapy—use continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) devices.** If the self-help

tips above don't work, you may need medical therapy. Your physician may recommend a CPAP device that works by pumping room air through a hose to a mask that fits over the nose or the full face. An air compressor forces air through the nasal passages, thus holding the throat open and allowing improved breathing. The appropriate CPAP pressure is determined during a sleep study conducted by a sleep medicine specialist. Although about 70 percent of patients do well on CPAP therapy, some patients may experience dryness in the throat or nose. A humidifier or nasal sprays can often solve this problem.

**36. Oral appliances or surgery.** If you have mild or moderate apnea, your physician may recommend an oral appliance that can open the airways by bringing your tongue or jaw forward. A dentist who works with a sleep disorders center usually fits these appliances. Sleep apnea can also be treated surgically by removal of the tonsils, uvula, and excess throat tissues in order to increase the size of the airway. Success rates vary greatly depending on which procedure is chosen and the experience and skill of the surgeons.

### **Driving While Sleepy**

The National Sleep Foundation reports that about 32 million Americans (about 17 percent of the population) admitted to falling asleep while driving at least once during the previous year. Drowsy driving is just as dangerous as drinking and driving.

Even if you lose only 1 or 2 hours of sleep a night, the effect is equivalent to or greater than driving while above the legal alcohol limit. A recent study found that being awake for 18 hours produced a level of impairment that was equal to a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05. After 24 hours of being awake it rose to 0.10, which is recognized as legally drunk in all states.

**37. Get consistent good sleep.** This preventive measure is the best way to prevent drowsy driving. Follow all the tips listed in this booklet that are rele-

vant to you. Determine whether you have good sleep habits and an environment and diet that are conducive to sleep.

**38. Treat underlying sleep disorders.** Determine whether you have an underlying sleep disorder that needs to be treated. Insomnia and sleep apnea were mentioned previously as possible causes of daytime sleepiness. Untreated sleep apnea, for example, can increase your chances of getting into an automobile accident by almost 7 times. Another sleep disorder, known as narcolepsy, causes a person to fall asleep rapidly in any situation. Get treatment from a sleep specialist.

**39. Be aware of your internal clock.** Your body's internal clock (called its *circadian rhythm*) makes you feel sleepy during two times in a 24-hour period: once at night (especially between midnight and 8.00 a.m.) and once during the early afternoon (generally between 1.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m.). Drowsy-driving accidents are very common during these times of day. If you need to drive during these times, make sure you get adequate rest beforehand.

**40. Avoid alcohol if sleep deprived.** Because alcohol naturally makes you feel sleepy, its effects are multiplied when consumed by a sleep-deprived person. More than either drowsiness or alcohol alone, this combination can significantly lower your control while driving. In one study, someone who had 1 beer and 4 hours of sleep was affected in the same way as someone who was well-rested but had 6 beers.

**41. Stop driving if you are sleepy.** If you feel drowsy while driving, stop the car and nap. If you have another person with you, rotate the driving when you become sleepy. Note that turning the radio up or opening a window may rouse you briefly, but will likely not prevent you from dozing off. You may doze for a couple of seconds at a time without even knowing it—this is enough time to get into a serious accident.

## **How to Talk with Your Doctor About Your Sleep Health**

Your doctor is your advocate and guide. However, you alone must take full responsibility for your health in general and your sleep health in particular. The first step toward responsibility is becoming an informed patient and knowing what to discuss with your physician.

You may want to set aside a physician's visit to specifically discuss your sleep health. In order to enhance communication between you and your physician, be prepared to share the following sleep information with him or her:

- If you wake up feeling tired
- If you feel sleepy during the day or fall asleep when watching TV or reading
- If you have difficulty staying asleep or falling asleep
- How much time you spend sleeping
- The times you wake up and go to bed
- If you snore and how loudly you do it
- Whether you take daytime naps
- Your smoking habits and alcohol and caffeine use
- Conditions of your sleep environment such as amount of light in your room or level of noise
- List of drugs including sleeping pills that you are currently taking
- When you exercise and when you have your last meal of the day
- If you feel drowsy when driving
- If you are involved in shift work
- If you are angry and/or depressed

## **Resources to Help You**

### ***Web sites***

*National Sleep Foundation*  
[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

*American Sleep Apnea Association*  
[www.sleepapnea.org](http://www.sleepapnea.org)

*National Center on Sleep Disorders Research,  
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute*

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncsdr](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncsdr)

[www.sleep-wellness.org](http://www.sleep-wellness.org)

Get your free special report, "How to Get Quality Sleep for Good Health," at our Web site.

### ***Further Reading***

William Dement, *The Promise of Sleep* (Dell, 2000; 512 pages). This book gives detailed explanations of different sleep concepts and conditions including sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, insomnia, and narcolepsy.

Gregg D. Jacobs, *Say Goodnight to Insomnia* (Owl Books, 1999; 240 pages). This book focuses on managing insomnia through biofeedback, positive thinking, and good sleep habits.

James B. Maas, *Power Sleep* (Quill, 1999; 320 pages). A practical book that gives sleep tips for parents, travelers, and people with general sleep disorders.

Reshmi M. Siddique, Ph.D. and Mahmood I. Siddique, D.O., *How to Turn Anger into Love* (QualHealth Inc., 2004; 160 pages). This book gives techniques on managing and assertively communicating anger, which is often the cause of depression and consequent sleeplessness and insomnia. Focusing on mind/body interactions, the book also offers meditation and general stress management techniques that can enhance sleep. Available by calling (800) 247-6553. Or order by visiting [www.HowToTurnAngerIntoLove.com](http://www.HowToTurnAngerIntoLove.com).



## About the Author

Dr. Mahmood I. Siddique is a Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. He received his degree from the Midwestern University, Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine; completed his residency in Internal Medicine at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and fellowship in Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland.

Dr. Siddique is Board Certified in Internal Medicine, Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine. He received multiple teaching excellence awards at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. He was selected to be on the peer-nominated Best Doctors list. He has authored book chapters and many scientific articles in peer reviewed journals and co-authored the book *How to Turn Anger into Love*.

Dr. Siddique has extensive experience in the diagnosis and treatment of a wide variety of sleep and lung disorders including snoring, sleep apnea, insomnia, restless legs syndrome, asthma, allergies and COPD. He applies the most advanced diagnostic and therapeutic techniques in the day-to-day care of his patients.

Dr. Siddique strongly believes in implementing strategies that will treat the source of the disease rather than treating only the symptoms, and in treating the whole patient rather than only the disorder. He takes the time to listen to his patients and works closely with them to develop an individualized plan of care to promote health and wellness. Dr. Siddique believes in educating each patient about his or her disorder and encourages an open line of communication between the patient, himself and his highly trained and experienced staff.

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