

## Healthy Sleep Tips<sup>1</sup>

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Healthy sleep habits can make a big difference in your quality of life. Having healthy sleep habits is often referred to as having good “sleep hygiene.” Try to keep the following sleep practices.

### 1 Stick to the same bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends

Helps to regulate your body clock and could help you fall asleep and stay asleep for the entire night.

### 2 Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual

A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime, away from bright lights, helps separate your sleep time from activities that cause excitement, stress or anxiety. Stressful or upbeat activities make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep, or remain asleep.

### 3 Avoid naps, especially in the afternoon

Power napping may help you get through the day, but if you find that you can't fall asleep at bedtime, eliminating even short catnaps will help.

### 4 Exercise daily

Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no activity. Exercise at any time of day, but not at the expense of your sleep. Make exercise part of your routine – every day.

### 5 Evaluate your room

Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep. Your bedroom should be cool – between 60 and 67 degrees. It should also be free from any noise that could disturb your sleep. Finally, your bedroom should be free from any light.

Check your room for noises or other distractions. This includes a bed partner's sleep disruptions such as snoring. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise" machines, humidifiers, fans or other devices.

### 6 Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows

Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. The one you have been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy – about 9 or 10 years for most good quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep and free of allergens that might affect you and objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

### 7 Use bright light to help manage your circadian rhythms

Avoid bright light in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning. This will keep your circadian rhythms in check.

### 8 Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and heavy meals in the evening

Alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine can disrupt sleep. Eating big or spicy meals can cause discomfort from indigestion and make it hard to sleep. Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before bedtime.

### 9 Wind down

Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode, so spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity such as reading.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on: <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-tools-tips/healthy-sleep-tips>

## 10 Go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired

If you are awake for more than 20 minutes in bed, move to a different part of the house (one without bright lights). Do something relaxing until you begin to feel tired and then go back to bed.

## Relaxation Exercises for Falling Asleep<sup>2</sup>

If you have trouble falling asleep, relaxation techniques will help you quieten your mind and calm your body. Try one of these simple exercises when you're in bed.

### 11 Breathing exercise

Close your eyes and notice your breathing. Turn all your attention to your natural breathing pattern and feel the air enter and leave your nose or mouth. Visualize the flow of air as it passes through your mouth, airways, down into your belly, and back out again.

Survey your body for any tension, and as you exhale, feel the tension leave that part of your body. Visualize your breath reaching your forehead, your neck, your shoulders, your arms... and then releasing the tension as you exhale. If your mind wanders to another worry or thought, let it go and gently redirect your attention back to your breath.

### 12 Guided imagery

This exercise is to focus your attention on an image or story, so that your mind can let go of worries or thoughts that are keeping you awake. Get into a comfortable position in bed. Close your eyes and relax. Visualize a scene, memory, or story that you find calming. This is highly individual—find what works best for you by trying a few choices. A favorite vacation or calming outdoor spot, a relaxing activity like curling up with a book in your favorite chair, or something repetitive like remembering the steps of an exercise or dance routine are some examples.

If your mind drifts to an unrelated thought, just bring it back to what you were thinking about. The key is to find something that allows you to focus your attention and let go of other thoughts. Begin to create this scenario in your mind. Visualize all the details of the image or story, as slowly and carefully as you can. If you are distracted with other thoughts, acknowledge them and let them go. Turn your mind's eye back to your relaxing story. Each time you practice you will get better at it.

### 13 Additional tips if you have difficulty sleeping

Using electronic devices such as a laptop near bedtime interferes asleep. The type of light emanating from screens activates the brain. Avoid electronics before bed or in the middle of the night. Keep work materials, computers, mobile phones and televisions out of the sleeping environment. Use your bed only for sleep and sex to strengthen the association between bed and sleep. If you associate an activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine.

Turn off electronics and rotate your clock away from you (don't watch the clock or check your phone if you can't sleep). Try not to worry if you can't fall asleep, and remind yourself that your body will eventually take over and help you sleep.

If you're still having trouble sleeping, don't hesitate to speak with your doctor or to [find a sleep professional](#). You may also benefit from recording your sleep in a [Sleep Diary](#) to help you better evaluate common patterns or issues you may see with your sleep or sleeping habits. If you would like some help with meditation or relaxation techniques, get in touch with us below.

Dr Pauline Enright Mobile: 0409 191 342  
Email: [pauline@radiancehobart.com.au](mailto:pauline@radiancehobart.com.au)

PO Box 907, Sandy Bay, TAS 7006  
Website: [www.radiancehobart.com.au](http://www.radiancehobart.com.au)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://sleepfoundation.org/relaxation-exercises-falling-asleep-0>