

The Fatigue Specialist's Secrets to Optimal Sleep

1. Use the bed and bedroom for sleep only. This trains the brain to associate the bedroom with sleep and helps you fall asleep quickly.
2. The next step to the sleep of your dreams is to set your wake-up time. Make sure it allows you enough time to eat a wholesome breakfast and get ready for the day without feeling rushed or time-stressed. Get up at that time everyday including weekends no matter what happens during the day or night. Make sure you use an alarm so you don't oversleep.
3. Create a relaxing pre-sleep ritual that takes 45 minutes to one hour to perform. The ritual should be a set of routine behaviours that you can repeat before every sleep period in the same order. For example, have a light snack, brush your teeth, shower, pick your clothes for the next day, lock the outside door, and then read. Make sure you choose a very relaxing behaviour to perform at the end of the ritual, like reading. Do not talk on the phone, watch TV, surf the internet, or review the next day's agenda.
4. Count backwards from your wake-up time about 9 hours. Set this time as the beginning of your pre-sleep ritual. Always start your bedtime ritual at this time.
5. Wait until you are drowsy before you lay down in bed. Don't force or try to sleep, just let it happen. When you fall asleep quickly, your mind and body learn to associate the bed and the bedroom with sleep and not lying there awake. This means that the last step of your ritual must be completed outside of the bed and preferably bedroom and you must continue it until you feel drowsy.
6. When you finally do feel drowsy, crawl into bed, turn out the light, and do so with the intention of falling asleep quickly. Allow sleep to come over you. If you do not feel yourself falling asleep within 10 minutes, get out of bed and return to the last relaxing step of your pre-sleep ritual.
7. Continue this relaxing activity outside the bed and bedroom for at least ten minutes, and then see how you feel. If you feel drowsy and sleepy, then return to bed, if not, wait until you do before crawling back into bed.

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8. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until you fall asleep.
9. Repeat steps 5 and 6 when you can't fall back to sleep in the middle of the night or early in the morning.
10. Remove the stress of your bedroom clock by putting it in a drawer so you can still hear the alarm but you cannot see the time. Clocks create too much time pressure.
11. Within 30 minutes of waking up, expose your eyes to bright light from indirect sunlight or from a bright light therapy unit for 30 to 45 minutes.
12. During the day, do not nap or lie down at all unless you are taking a prophylactic nap.
13. Here's a hard one, remove all caffeine from your regular diet. This includes chocolate! If you can't, then refrain from consuming anything containing caffeine after 11:00 am or 3 hours awake waking up. Caffeine should only be used as a fatigue countermeasure or personal fatigue prevention strategy.
14. Do not drink alcohol within 4 hours of your pre-sleep ritual. If you smoke, of course you should quit. If this is not possible, then refrain from smoking 4 hours before your pre-sleep ritual. Do not smoke in the middle of the night if you wake up and can't get back to sleep.
15. Exercise regularly; make sure you have finished your exercise three hours before your pre-sleep ritual.
16. Make sure your bedroom is conducive to sleep. This means it should be dark, quiet and between 17 - 22°C with humidity between 30 & 50%.

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Extra Secrets for the Shift-Worker

1. Dim the lights, close window coverings and use blue light filtering sunglasses indoors as soon as you can before you sleep, before your pre-sleep ritual is best.
2. Use ear plugs, an eye mask, blackout curtains and a white noise generator to make your bedroom soporific.
3. Develop house rules for sleeping, engage the whole family/household in developing the rules. Rules should address phone ringers, doorbells and other disturbances.
4. If you are working nights, try to sleep as close to your night shift as possible.
5. Use naps to bring your total daily sleep up to at least 8 hours.
6. If you are not on permanent nights, try to get at least 4 hours of anchor sleep at the same time every night.
7. Protect your sleep time. Prioritize your sleep management. This means, asking people to work around your schedule, not theirs.
8. Shield your eyes from light during your sleep period using dark wrap around sunglasses or blue light filtering glasses.
9. Explore the use of melatonin, kava kava, valerian, Sleepy-Time tea (Celestial brand) and other OTC's like Alteril before bed.
10. Don't use alcohol, marijuana, dimenhydrinate (Gravol) or diphenhydramine (Benadryl) as sleep aids. Discuss your shift-work with your medical doctor and ask for a prescription sleep aid for occasional use.
11. Don't use pseudoephedrine (Sinutab), methylphenidate (Ritalin) or nicotine to maintain alertness. Discuss your shift-work with your medical doctor and ask for a prescription alertness aid such as modafinil (Alertec/Provigil) for occasional use during safety critical times.

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