



## TEN TIPS TO BEAT INSOMNIA

If you are suffering from insomnia, there are many steps you can take to change behaviors and lifestyle to help you get to sleep. Here are some tips for beating insomnia.

1. **Wake up at the same time each day.** It is tempting to sleep late on weekends, especially if one has had poor sleep during the week. However, if you suffer from insomnia you should get up at the same time every day in order to train your body to wake at a consistent time.
2. **Eliminate nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, and other stimulants.** The effects of caffeine can last for several hours, perhaps up to 24 hours, so the chances of it affecting sleep are significant. Caffeine may not only cause difficulty initiating sleep, but may also cause frequent awakenings. Alcohol may have a sedative effect for the first few hours following consumption, but it can then lead to frequent arousals and a non-restful night's sleep. If you are on medications that act as stimulants, such as decongestants or asthma inhalers, ask your doctor when they should best be taken to help minimize any affect on sleep.
3. **Limit naps.** While napping seems like a proper way to catch up on missed sleep, it is not always so. It is important to establish and maintain a regular sleep pattern and train oneself to associate sleep with cues like darkness and a consistent bedtime. Napping can affect the quality of nighttime sleep.
4. **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise can improve sleep quality and duration. However, exercising immediately before bedtime can have a stimulant effect on the body and should be avoided. Try to finish exercising at least three hours before you plan to retire for the night.
5. **Limit activities in bed.** The bed is for sleeping and having sex and that's it. If you suffer from insomnia, do not balance the checkbook, study, or make phone calls, for example, while in bed or even in the bedroom, and avoid watching television or listening to the radio. All these activities can increase alertness and make it difficult to fall asleep.
6. **Do not eat or drink right before going to bed.** Eating a late dinner or snacking before going to bed can activate the digestive system and keep you up. If you suffer from gastroesophageal reflux (GERD) or heartburn, it is even more important to avoid eating and drinking right before bed since this can make your symptoms worse. In addition, excessive drinking prior to bed can overwhelm the bladder, requiring frequent visits to the bathroom.
7. **Make your sleeping environment comfortable.** Temperature, lighting, and noise should be controlled to make the bedroom conducive to falling (and staying) asleep. Your bed should feel comfortable and if you have a pet that sleeps in the room with you, consider having the pet sleep somewhere else if it tends to make noise in the night.
8. **Get all your worrying over with before you go to bed.** If you find you lay in bed thinking about tomorrow, consider setting aside a period of time -- perhaps after dinner -- to review the day and to make plans for the next day. The goal is to avoid doing these things while trying to fall asleep. It is also useful to make a list of, say, work-related tasks for the next day before leaving work. That, at least, eliminates one set of concerns.
9. **Reduce stress.** There are a number of relaxation therapies and stress reduction methods you may want to try to relax the mind and the body before going to bed. Examples include progressive muscle relaxation (perhaps with audio tapes), deep breathing techniques, imagery, meditation, and biofeedback.
10. **Consider participating in cognitive therapy.** Cognitive therapy helps some people with insomnia identify and correct inappropriate thoughts and beliefs that may contribute to insomnia. In addition, cognitive therapy can give people the proper information about sleep norms, age-related sleep changes, and help set reasonable sleep goals, among other things.

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