

Some ways to help you get a good night's sleep

The most important thing to remember is that sleep isn't about quantity, it's about the quality of that sleep. Following these simple guidelines will mean that the quality of your sleep will improve.

How do we know it's time to sleep?

A key factor in regulating our sleep is our exposure to light and dark. Light: the body thinks it's daylight and time to wake up so our body temperature begins to raise and our body starts releasing hormones like cortisol to prepare us for the day ahead. Darkness, and the same thing happens but our body starts preparing for sleep by releasing sleep promoting hormones. The hypothalamus, a gland in our body, tells the pineal gland to release a hormone called melatonin as the day starts to darken, and this is the trigger that starts making us feel less alert and ready for sleep: artificial indoor lighting can be enough to prevent the release of melatonin.

Think ahead

Establish a bedtime routine to remind your body that the day is drawing to a close and that you are ready to wind down; this should start about an hour before bedtime. Aim to do your bedtime 'rituals' at the roughly the same time every night, these might include:

- Washing / bathing
- A warm soothing drink
- Brushing teeth
- Reading
- Going to bed

Experts say that establishing a regular sleep pattern, which includes rituals like a warm soothing drink and brushing teeth, is really good for you.

Think about your last meal of the day

According to dieticians, you should try and have your last meal at least 3 hours before your bedtime. If you do feel peckish before bedtime then eating something like a banana is an excellent choice as it contains B6, a vitamin that helps the body in creating serotonin, a hormone that helps promote sleep: this is used by the body to help produce melatonin.

A place to relax

Make your bedroom a calm and relaxing place and declutter where possible.

Wind down

Technology can be over-stimulating. According to the UK's Sleep Council: "Blue light emitting from gadgets stimulates the brain and inhibits melatonin production - the hormone you need to sleep." So, avoid using these in the hour or so before you go to bed, and recharge them away from the bedroom. If you are really struggling with sleep, you may even need to consider no television in

the hour before bedtime: so this may mean going to bed an hour earlier than normal and reading so that you are ready for bed and for sleep at your usual time.

Bath time

Taking a warm bath or shower can form part of your bedtime routine. Experts suggest that this should be taken around 30 minutes before your actual bedtime.

Use essential oils

Sweet marjoram essential oil is the best oil for helping with a peaceful sleep because it has a calming and sedating action on the nervous system that helps to lower blood pressure and ease nervous tension and hyperactivity - all of which can exacerbate sleep problems. It's also great for muscles and joints!

Other oils you can also use are Lavender, Chamomile and Ylang Ylang.

If you know you are a worrier

Why not have a little notebook by your bed. In the back of the book you can write down your worries or anxieties about the day, just so you can get them out of your head, but in the front you **must** balance this with things that have brought you happiness, comfort or joy, or that you are grateful for, over the course of the day. These could be as simple as a delicious meal, that someone gave you a hug, the time you spent with a pet, a joke you shared with a friend.

And, if you still can't sleep

Always try to keep your thoughts positive, so don't worry if you can't fall asleep. Some ideas to think of instead:

- Focus on the sensation of your body within the bed as it touches the mattress and duvet and the rise and fall of your breath - not on the sleep you are not getting
- ABC - Work your way slowly through the alphabet thinking of things along a theme, for example foods, names, countries, bands etc.

Includes information adapted from *Nine Ways to guarantee a good night's sleep* and *Essential bedtime oils* from Breathe Magazine, Issue 1, and from the National Sleep Foundation <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-tools-tips/healthy-sleep-tips> (last accessed 09/11/18).