

Maximizing Your Sleep Time

Sleep is one of the main pillars of healing, it is the time when your body repairs, restores and renews itself. If sleep quality is lacking then daytime functioning is impaired. People with poor sleep quality often complain of fatigue, poor concentration, failing memory, low attention capacity, frequent colds and flu, inability to lose weight and overall decreased health and vitality. Here are some simple suggestions to improve sleep quality. If you are suffering from severe or long-standing insomnia, please consult Dr. Neuzil as you may need more drastic measures.

1. **Dark!** Clear difference between the dark of the sleep environment and light of day is one of the major triggers your body uses to regulate your sleep wake cycle. For severe sleep disturbance it is suggested that there be no light even if you get up in the night to use the restroom. Check for the following light sources:
 - a. LED lights on electronic devices
 - b. Alarm clocks
 - c. Windows – make sure they are covered so that external light doesn't enter.
 - d. Night lights, hall lights, closet lights and light from other rooms
 - e. TV
2. **Quiet!** Many people are kept in a lighter state of sleep because of external noise, some noise is unavoidable but it is better not to sleep with TV or radio. If external noise is a problem, a source of white noise may be helpful, such as a fan, air purifier, humidifier or white noise machine.
3. **Caffeine** – check your caffeine intake. More than 2 cups of coffee a day or the equivalent can lead to restlessness at night, even if you do not “feel” the effects of the coffee.
4. **Sugar** – Sugar or high glycemic index foods like pastas, breads, and starches should not be consumed within 5 hours of going to sleep. These elevate your blood sugar, which in turn elevates your insulin and cortisol (the ultimate wake-up hormone). In general a lower glycemic index diet will help to improve sleep. This means reduce your sugar and carbohydrate intake!
5. **Liquids** – if you often have to wake to use the restroom, try not to consume liquids three hours prior to going to bed. Also use the restroom immediately prior to sleeping.
6. **Routine** – for many people it is extremely helpful to develop a daily routine in which they go to bed and wake at the same time every day. This helps the body to normalize hormone production.
7. **Meditation** – some form of pre-sleep relaxation technique can be extremely helpful. One of the most commonly used ones is to lie in bed and take 4-5 deep breaths. Visualize your toes becoming heavy and numb, then your feet, your ankles, your lower legs, etc... Feel this numbness and heaviness moving up your body towards your head. Most people can train themselves to relax and fall asleep this way. After using the technique for a while, it is difficult to stay awake past the knees!
8. **Wind-down time** – create a separation between work time and sleep time. Create a time for your body and mind to relax and unwind. This could be reading, listening to music, flipping through a magazine, sitting on the porch, whatever will help you unwind. If it is TV for you try to watch something that is not overly stimulating (i.e. violent or inflammatory).
9. **Supplements** – Melatonin is clearly effective but not right for everyone, also 5-HTP and a variety of herbs can be extremely helpful. Dr. Neuzil will make specific suggestions for you based on your particular situation.
10. **Homeopathy** – Classical homeopathy is one of the most effective, gentle ways to improve sleep quality. For more information please see Dr. Neuzil or the homeopathy section of the website.
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