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Sleep Hygiene:

Habits to Help You Sleep

Disclaimer:

This eBook was written by Adrian Muxlow. I am not a doctor or mental health professional and cannot be held liable for the information written here.

This book is meant to provide information to help you get better quality sleep. For medical assistance, please seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

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Introduction

Getting better sleep is something everyone should focus on, but far too many people take it for granted. You might even brag about how little sleep you get, but this it the very last thing you should be bragging about.

Sleep is an integral part of your health and wellness. It gives you more energy, helps you stay focused throughout the day, makes you a happier and more balanced person.

When you neglect your sleep, you continue having less energy, less concentration, lower productivity, and eventually develop mental and physical effects of sleep deprivation like headaches, digestive issues, brain fog, and increased anxiety and depression.

This eBook is going to guide you through the process of improving your sleep through your daily habits, called sleep hygiene.
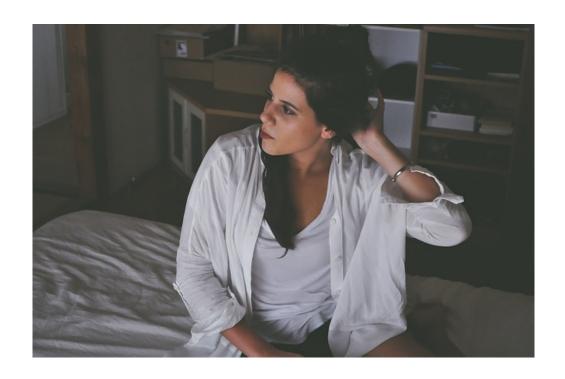
You will learn what sleep hygiene is and why it is so crucial to getting better sleep.

This includes lessons on:

What sleep hygiene is.
Why you need to have a relaxing sleep environment.
The importance of unplugging at night.
How to start a new nighttime routine.

Keep reading to learn how you can get the best sleep ever by focusing on your habits.

Chapter 1. Understanding Sleep Hygiene

Many people have issues in getting a great night's sleep, but few realize that insomnia issues may be directly related to the lack of sleep hygiene. If you are one of these people, you might know you have issues with getting proper sleep, but aren't sure exactly why.

While some people experience sleep disturbances because of stress, poor diet, and a variety of medical and mental health conditions, other people just need to do one simple thing – improve their sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene is defined as the habits and procedures that you follow to get a good night's sleep to be fully alert the next day. Unfortunately, too many people do not have strong habits in place to maximize their rest. Consider this simple list of ways that you can use to improve your sleep hygiene dramatically.

1. What is Sleep Hygiene?

Sleep hygiene is all about your habits and practices that can improve or derail your sleep. These are habits many people don't even think about, and definitely don't realize affect their ability to get a good night's sleep.

Think about what you do shortly before bed. Maybe you have a bath or shower, brush your teeth, listen to music or watch TV. These are all habits that you probably do every night, without thinking about it.

Some habits are great and can encourage good sleep. But others can actually keep you from falling asleep on time, and disrupt your sleep rhythm, causing you to get out of deep sleep multiple times a night.

This often causes fatigue and sluggishness throughout the day.

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices and habits that are necessary to have good nighttime sleep quality and full daytime alertness.

If you are struggling with fatigue during the day, then you probably need to work on your sleep hygiene.

2. Simple Sleep Habits to Start with

Before getting too involved in changing your entire routine, it is good to start small. Just change a few habits and upgrade your sleeping environment to start improving your sleep overall.

Here are some simple sleep habits to start with:

Invest in Good Sleeping Equipment

To start with, stop sleeping anywhere but your bed. Get used to turning off the television in the living room and getting off the couch so you can head to your bedroom. Sleeping on the couch might seem restful, but you probably wake up multiple times a night, especially if you leave the TV on.

You also want to get a better mattress and bedding if it is a little outdated. Without a doubt, purchasing a comfortable mattress can significantly improve the quality of your sleep every night.

In addition, don't be afraid to place extra pillows in your bed to add to the level of comfort you experience when it is time to sleep. It is also recommended to wash all of your sheets and pillows at least once a week to keep allergens and dust to a minimum in your room. If you suffer from allergies of a kind, using hypoallergenic bedding materials can really improve your ability to rest well.

Getting some shut-eye is much easier with the right sleeping equipment in a pleasant environment. The National Sleep Foundation suggests that using eye shades, ear plugs, blackout curtains, white noise machines, humidifiers, and other equipment can make your room a more relaxing zone.

Get Some Exercise

If you want to improve your sleep hygiene, you should consider exercising more. Multiple studies show that working out every day, even for 10 minutes, can help your body become more prone to sleep later on. However, avoid strenuous exercise before sleeping at night because it has the opposite effect.

Try some light yoga or a simple stretching routine, and it will help you sleep soundly. If you enjoy cardio, schedule it for a few hours before your normal bedtime.

Develop A Sleep Routine

A great way to ensure that you fall to sleep at the proper time every night is to develop a sleep routine, Before bed, you may want to take a long shower or a hot bath with aromatic oils to release stress and become drowsy.

You can follow up by reading an interesting book or listening to some peaceful music to prepare yourself to go to sleep. You can also write or meditate to clear your mind of any thoughts that prevent keep you from entering slumberland. There is no right or wrong way to do this, as long as it is something you can keep up with.

Aim for Eight Hours of Rest

On average, many individuals do well with receiving anywhere from 6-8 hours of sleep per night. The exact amount of time for rest varies for each person. Once you pinpoint how many hours it takes for you to feel adequately rested and rejuvenated, them you must plan accordingly. Creating a sleep schedule that gives you ample time to get enough sleep is important for your livelihood and health.

Never Eat Late at Night

Do you know that if you eat too late in the day that your digestive issues can keep you up at night? Doctors recommend that you should not consume anything past 8 pm each night, or you run the risk of your dinner or late-night snack interrupting your precious sleep pattern.

If you chow down on fatty processed foods at weird hours of the night, your stomach may experience greater issues. Not only can eating at a decent hour improve your ability to fall asleep, but your body benefits from fewer gastrointestinal issues during the day and night.

Avoid Stimulants

The Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical school suggests that you should avoid foods that contain caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol if you want to get to sleep. These chemicals are actually stimulants that can keep you up later at night than normal. If you are looking for a nighttime tea, try chamomile or valerian tea.

3. How Your Daily Habits Dictate Your Sleep

What's all the fuss about your daily habits and sleep hygiene? What you choose to do (or not do) each day is affecting your mind, mental health, and ability to relax in the evening.

It might sound like fun to eat your favorite meal and follow it up with a few drinks, but alcohol is known to affect your sleep. It can feel like you get better sleep after drinking alcohol, but you are never fully rested. This is why you often wake up feeling like you were hit by a truck.

Developing Good Daily Habits

Keep in mind that not all habits will seem like they help with sleep, but by improving your overall health and wellness, you encourage good sleep at the same time. Don't feel like you need to change everything at once – just one simple change at a time will make a drastic difference.

If you're not sure where to start, try the following as soon as possible:

Shut off your phone and television when you are going to sleep.

Meditate or write in a journal shortly before bed.

Change your bedding or upgrade to something more comfortable.

Listen to soft music in the evening instead of something that stimulates your mind.

Find more relaxing, quiet activities in the evenings, such as reading or taking a bath.

Add physical activity during the day to increase how tired you are at night.

The Importance of Unplugging

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to unplug at night. This can be hard to do since you are used to being attached to your phone at all times, but it causes a lot of distractions.

If family and friends are bound to contact you at all hours of the night just to chat, turning off the tech can be a real sleep-saver. Shutting off the television helps you get to sleep faster, so you won't be tempted to binge-watch your favorite shows after dark.

Embrace the idea of a good night's sleep, because it can only benefit you. Not only can the proper sleep improve your work and academic performance, but it can also make you a more livelier person to be around.

4. Creating a New Nighttime Routine

Part of practicing good sleep hygiene and changing your sleep habits is to have a nighttime routine. This might seem silly, but it can make all the difference when it comes to getting a good nights' sleep.

Here are some tips for creating a good nighttime routine:

Start Winding Down Ahead of Time

Your nighttime routine should start a few hours before it is time for bed. You want to have an approximate time for going to sleep each night, as long as your work schedule allows it. This makes it easier to create a routine that works good for you.

About 1-2 hours before you intend to go to sleep, start winding down. This should include turning the volume down on any electronics, switching over to relaxing activities, and cutting off the snacks and drinks (see below). This extra time allows your body and mind to prepare for bed.

Plan Relaxing Activities

Your nighttime routine should include relaxing, quiet, restful activities. While they can vary based on the person and your own preferences, these activities might include:

Writing in a journal or planner – Writing in a journal or planner allows you to check in with yourself, cross items off your to-do list, and empty your mind of worries from the day so you aren't laying in bed all night thinking about it.

Taking a bath or shower – Even if you take a shower in the morning, consider adding it to your evening routine as well. This is going to help you relax with a combination of the hot water and any essential oils or aromatherapy body products you decide to use.

Meditating – This is an amazing way to relax your mind and thoughts before bed. If you struggle with sleep due to stress, you definitely want to add meditation to your routine.

Reading – Reading in bed can help to make you tired, but choose something that doesn't stimulate your mind too much or cause you to want to finish the book before you go to sleep.

Stop Eating or Drinking Before Bed

You also want to be careful about eating or drinking too soon before bed. Too much water or other liquids could cause your sleep to be interrupted by using the restroom, while food can cause indigestion or acid reflux.

5. Consistency is Key

The most important thing with your sleep hygiene is to be consistent in these habits. The longer you keep up with healthier habits and participate in your nighttime routine, the more effective it is going to be for improved sleep.

Getting Started

Choose a bedtime. To start with, choose a bedtime that works with your schedule. At the very least, go to bed at the same time every workday, so that on those nights, you know you are giving yourself plenty of time for good sleep.

Create your nighttime routine. Using the tips above, add some activities to your nighttime routine that are good for your body and mind, and help you relax to fall asleep faster.

Improve your daily habits. It isn't just habits before bed that help you sleep, but during the day as well. This includes reducing caffeinated beverages, eating a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, and working on reducing your stress and anxiety.

Chapter 2. The Effects of Sleep Deprivation

Sleep is critical to the maintenance of an individual's health. Lack of proper rest can lead to a variety of problems impacting a stricken individual's physical and mental well-being over the long and short-term.

The problems with not getting enough sleep are long and complicated, but they all start with the effects sleep deprivation has on your mind and body.

From worsening health problems and affecting your energy level throughout the day, to increasing feelings of anxiety and stress, it is imperative that you learn how it affects you and what you can do about it.

How Is Sleep Deprivation Defined?

Sleep deprivation is defined by not only lacking appropriate rest but not receiving the necessary total sleep that occurs when someone reaches a complete state of rest.

Neglected sleep is hard to quantify. The average person needs roughly eight hours of sleep per night. However, sleep requirements can vary with age and be dependent upon several other factors such as the individual in question's health, life circumstances and general health.

Keep in mind sleep deprivation and insomnia can include having trouble falling asleep, as well as staying asleep. Even if you fall asleep quickly, waking up every hour or so is not normal, and is keeping you from a deep sleep that your body and mind needs for proper rest.

Continue reading if you want to know more about sleep deprivation, how to recognize the signs, and learn about the potential side effects.

1. The Causes of Sleep Deprivation

Deprived sleep could be precipitated by numerous physical, medical and environmental factors. Before looking at the effects of sleep deprivation, it is important to have a good understanding of why this could be happening.

Keep in mind there are many potential causes for sleep deprivation, from anxiety and depression, to various health conditions. Other causes could simply be habits or lifestyle choices that are very easy to fix.

Here are some of the most common causes for sleep deprivation.

Underlying Health Problems

Several medical maladies might cause sleep disruptions due to the symptoms they produce. The good news is that if any of these medical conditions sound familiar to you, you know that treating the medical condition might in return help to treat the sleep issues you are having.

Common conditions include:

Sleep Apnea – With sleep apnea, you experience breathing disturbances at night, which often shock your body awake. This can happen whether you are fully aware of it or not.

Acid Reflux – You might have discomfort at night as soon as you lay down, which is when acid reflux symptoms worsen. Luckily, treatments are readily available.

Hormonal Disorders – Many people experience sleep issues when they are dealing with hormonal disorders or hormonal imbalances. A simple blood test from your doctor can help you get diagnosed for these.

Excessive Stress

Stress can take various forms and be precipitated by a variety of environmental, professional and personal causes. Everyone deals with a certain amount of stress, so while you can't always avoid it entirely, you should at least be able to reduce it. Try to find the cause of your stress first – whether it is from personal relationships, work, or home life.

Once you have narrowed down the main sources of your stress, you can try to eliminate them, or at least learn how to manage them better. This might mean finding enough time for self-care, avoiding certain toxic people leading to your stress, or working on healthier daily habits to overcome it.

Specific Medications

Certain medications contain ingredients that might enhance states of wakefulness because they contain stimulant drugs or produce sleep-disrupting side effects. It is a good idea to consider what medications you are currently taking and determine if they might be affecting your sleep.

Some medications might include:

Beta blockers
Corticosteroids
Diuretics
Clonidine
Cold or flu medications

If you take any of these regularly, talk to your doctor about possible alternatives.

Certain Foods and Beverages

Some foods contain stimulating substances like caffeine such as coffee, tea, soda and chocolate. Stimulants, especially if ingested in the evening or prior to said individual's regular bedtime, sleep deprivation could result.

Remember it is not just caffeinated coffee or soft drinks that might keep you from sleeping at night. It could be something as simple as chocolate for dessert, which is a known stimulant.

A Poor Diet

Poor eating habits or the consumption of non-nutritious foods could elicit fluctuations in an individual's blood sugar. Blood sugar variations, especially when they occur during the evening or during someone's regular sleeping hours could cause periods of hunger that interrupt rest cycles.

Signs and Symptoms of Sleep Deprivation

Repeated incidents of deprived sleep could manifest in acute symptoms such as yawning, tiredness, reduced reflexes, concentration difficulties, mood swings and memory problems. That said, the condition could also result in potentially more serious physical and mental medical issues.

2. Physical Effects of Sleep Deprivation

A continual lack of adequate rest could have an adverse impact on many bodily systems and ultimately result in a wide range of physical conditions.

Sleep deprivation doesn't just cause fatigue and low energy during the day, though you should definitely consider these common effects. It can actually be detrimental to your health and require any number of treatments – sometimes even hospitalization.

Here are some of the most common physical effects of being deprived of proper sleep:

Weakened Immune System

To start with, sleep deprivation could be weakening your immune system. Your body's entire system needs to work together to battle different illnesses, and this includes getting enough rest. Without it, you are potentially putting your immune system in jeopardy.

Why is this a problem? Because with a weakened immune system, you then run a higher risk of illnesses like a cold and flu, infections, and viruses.

Heart and Blood Pressure Issues

Your cardiovascular system can also be affected by not sleeping properly. Your blood and heart vessels need proper rest to keep functioning normally, so when you deny this basic bodily system enough sleep, you are increasing cardiovascular issues.

While it might not cause high blood pressure and heart problems on its own, it can exacerbate current cardiovascular issues and raise your risk for a number of related complications.

Hormonal Imbalances

Hormonal imbalances might not seem like a big problem, but they can eventually lead to more serious issues down the line. You might struggle with thyroid diseases, diabetes, or other endocrine diseases all because you are denying your body enough sleep.

3. Mental Effects of Sleep Deprivation

Continued occurrences of sleep deprivation could result in mental issues such as the potential to exhibit poor judgment, long-term memory loss, the development of anxiety disorders, depression and, in severe instances, possible outbreaks of psychoses.

Anxiety Disorders

If you suffer from an anxiety disorder like panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder, you are not doing it any favors by also getting inadequate amounts of sleep. Anxiety is a complicated mental health disorder, but one that can be worsened by sleep deprivation.

Treating anxiety is all about balance, and that begins with resting both your body and your mind.

Depression

Similar to anxiety, getting better sleep is not going to cure depression, but lack of sleep can make your symptoms worse. It can even trigger major depressive episodes in some cases. Don't underestimate how important good sleep can be for this and other mental health conditions.

Increased Stress

We spoke previously about how your stress could be exacerbated by lack of sleep, but it is worth repeating. Stress affects nearly every part of your life, from increasing other mental health disorders, to causing extreme fatigue, and affecting your personal and professional relationships.

It is worth noting that sleep deprivation has been the investigated cause of several major adverse events such as automobile accidents, industrial mishaps and plane crashes. Additionally, a chronic lack of sleep might also lead to less tragic but still significant problems like poor job performance.

4. Tips for Getting More Sleep

By now, you understand just how important it is that you get proper sleep. Sleep deprivation can be really frustrating, but all hope is not lost. Here are some tips to help you improve your sleep now.

Receiving a Medical Checkup

Since lack of sleep can be very closely related to physical conditions, this should be your first step. If nothing else, it will help to rule out conditions like diabetes or thyroid conditions so you can look at other potential causes.

Try to Adhere to A Specific and Constant Sleep Schedule

With so many people having demanding schedules that often change and tend to demand more and more of their time, orchestrating a regular sleep schedule might be difficult. However, when and if it can be done, medical professionals sleep experts suggest attempting to block out a specific time each night (or day) for sleep and not deviating unless it's absolutely necessary.

Receive A Proper Amount of Exercise

Engaging in regular physical exertion can work a participant's bones and muscles, prompting fatigue and a greater need for the body to rest. This doesn't need to be a strenuous workout every day, but try to participate in regular physical activities, such as walking your dog, doing yoga in the morning, or just taking a short walk during your lunch break.

Manage Stress

Ebbing incidents of stress, as well as precipitators of the emotional, physical and mental catalyst is not always simple. However, what individuals can control is how they react to stress and find constructive ways to deal with its occurrence. Someone who can trace their sleeping woes to the stress they are feeling, decreased tension might be found by engaging in a hobby or pleasant activity in the hours leading up to bedtime.

Chapter 3. Setting Up a Room Sanctuary

Dealing with lack of adequate sleep is something many people struggle with. Insomnia and sleep deprivation in general comes in many forms, from the inability to fall asleep quickly, to not being able to stay asleep through the night.

No matter what your personal sleep issues are, you should start by changing your sleep environment. If you are trying to sleep in a room that is too bright, has a lot of distractions, or is constantly cluttered, it is going to be difficult for you to get adequate rest.

Keep reading to learn more about setting up the perfect room sanctuary for a good night's sleep.

1. Have a Dark and Relaxing Sleep Environment

To start setting up your perfect sleep sanctuary, make sure your room is dark and promotes relaxation. You don't want it to be too bright, have gadgets on all night that cause light disturbances while you are sleeping, or be overly cluttered, which is nowhere near relaxing enough for good sleep.

Here are some tips for making sure you have a relaxing sleep environment and it is kept as dark as possible.

Get Blackout Curtains

Even if you keep your bedroom lights off at night when you are trying to sleep, there are many ways light can creep in through your windows. You might live close to the street, where street lights outside could come blaring in through the window. It could be something as simple as your neighbors next to you having their indoor lights on, or having the sun come up before you're ready for bed.

While regular curtains and blinds are a good start to keeping the light out, it is not always sufficient enough. The next best thing is to get blackout curtains. If you don't like how they look in your room, put them close to the window, then add another set of more aesthetically appealing curtains in front of them. You are able to block out the light, but also achieve the look you want in your bedroom.

Use Dimmer Switches for Lights

Another great idea is to get dimmer switches. Obviously, you are going to turn off the lights completely when it's time to go to sleep, but what about when you are relaxing and doing your nighttime routine? You probably don't want to sit in darkness while meditating or reading, but it is good to have softer light.

Dimmer switches allow you to control just how light or dark it is in your bedroom, so it is easy to adjust for different parts of the day and night.

Turn Off Electronics with Bright Lights

This is something many people don't consider when it comes to various distractions at night. Even if your room is as dark and relaxing as can be, you might have disturbances from just small pockets of light. This could be little lights from your laptop charging next to you on the nightstand, a light from your cell phone every time you get a notification, or light from the cable box if it is in front of you.

It is a good idea to completely unplug any devices or appliances that might be disturbing your slumber. Flip your cell phone over so the light doesn't disturb you, and consider rotating your computer and other devices (like the alarm clock) to keep the light from interrupting your sleep.

Get a Reading Lamp

Reading is a great activity to do at night before bed instead of watching TV or using your cell phone. It is relaxing and gets you into a good state of mind before bed.

Unfortunately, it requires a good amount of light, which might stimulate you instead of helping you to fall asleep. Consider instead a reading lamp, which is a little softer and is only bright enough to read, without flooding your entire bedroom.

2. Keep Bedroom Décor Calming and Peaceful

Once you have the lighting adjusted in your bedroom to keep it dark for optimal sleep, it is time to think about how you have your bedroom decorated. Colors can invoke all sorts of moods, from helping you feel cozier, to relaxing your body and mind. Unfortunately, there are also some color palettes that might keep you from getting the rest you need.

Here are some tips for decorating your bedroom in a calm and peaceful way.

Decorate in Muted Colors

Focus on more muted colors, aiming for neutrals and pastels. For a more calming environment in your bedroom, stick to cool colors like soft blues, greens, and purples. Avoid bright and bold colors, instead going for a light sage green, baby blue, and violet purple.

If you want your bedroom to be cozy, it is okay to incorporate warm colors like orange, red, and brown, but these should also be lighter and more muted. Think about how you feel in the fall when you are in a cozy room. This is what warm colors will give you.

Keep Neutral Shades on the Walls

For the walls, try to keep the color subtle and neutral. Choose from different white, off-white, tan, and grey shades only. Avoid all other colors for the bedroom wall, otherwise you risk being too stimulated when it is time to go to sleep.

Focus on Simplicity

While it is great to have a lot of different décor styles in other rooms of your home, you want to focus on simplicity in your bedroom. Choose muted, neutral colors, keep it orderly, and only have a few decorative elements if you can. This will keep it from feeling overwhelming and stimulate your brain too much. The last thing you want is a bedroom that makes you alert and energetic.

Reduce Clutter

People often underestimate how beneficial it is to have a clutter-free home. When you go to sleep in a bedroom that is disorganized and filled to the brim with clothing, shoes, and other belongings, it makes it that much harder for your brain rest. When you declutter and keep your bedroom clean, it can actually help to reduce stress. Plus, you will also wake up in a better mood.

3. Improve Your Mattress and Bedding

It probably goes without saying, but if you are having trouble sleeping, decide whether or not your bed or bedding is the problem. If you have had your mattress for longer than seven years, it is probably time for an upgrade. On the other hand, sometimes just getting new pillows and bedding is more than enough to create a cozy bed.

Choose Soft, High-Quality Bedding

Start with your bedding, as this is often the easiest thing to replace. If you wake up with head or neck pain, try switching to a different type of pillow. If your pillows are flat, you might need something a little thicker. If you have been using a firm pillow, try a softer pillow next time. It might take a little experimenting to see what pillows are best for you, since everyone has different preferences.

For the bedding, look for something that is soft and luxurious, instead of just your generic cotton sheets. This really can make all the difference as it helps you relax, get comfortable, and actually enjoy being in your bed.

Bedding Should Regulate Body Temperature

Another thing to look for in your new bedding is whether or not it can be used in different weather conditions. For example, flannel sheets are amazing during the colder months, but when summer arrives, you will be very miserable. If you live somewhere with extreme temperature changes, pick up different bedding depending on the climate.

Some sheets and comforters are meant for all types of weather, such as Egyptian cotton sheets and down comforters. These might be worth looking into.

Replace Your Mattress as Needed

Mattresses can get expensive, so don't feel like you need to replace your mattress just because you aren't getting good sleep. However, if you have an older mattress or you wake up with aches and pains, it might be a good idea. Here are some signs that it is time to replace it:

It is no longer big enough for who sleeps on it.
You constantly wake up with back or hip pain.
There is damage to the mattress (often from age).
You no longer have that cozy, comfortable feeling when lying down.

4. Avoid These Bad Bedroom Habits

If after these other bedroom changes, you are still struggling with getting a good night's sleep, it is time to consider your bedroom habits. You might have developed some bad habits that you don't realize are actually affecting your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Make sure you avoid these habits while in your bedroom and getting ready for bed:

Eating in Bed

This can be tempting when you want to watch Netflix at night in your bed, but not only is TV not recommended, but eating in bed can be disastrous. This poses a few different problems. First of all, the food you are eating might have something that will stimulate your brain, so it is causing you to get more energy instead of helping you feel tired.

You might also start to think of your bedroom as the hangout spot when you make a habit of eating in bed, which makes it hard to mentally view the bed as a place for rest. Also consider that eating too soon before going to sleep can cause abdominal discomfort and heartburn.

Working in Your Bedroom

Another common bad habit in the bedroom is working in your room. If you work from home, try to have a dedicated work space elsewhere. Even if you don't have an office, this can be at your dining room table or a desk in your living room.

If you need to work in your bedroom, at least have a small computer desk instead of working in your bed. You need to associate the bed with entire sleep or being intimate with your partner. Anything else can make it hard to get enough rest.

Keeping Your Phone Close By

You probably know you shouldn't be using your phone right before bed or leaving it on the bed while going to sleep. However, even having the vibrating ringer on or keeping it close to your bed can be a problem. This will encourage you to check it every time you wake up, which can then cause you to check social media, read emails, and get easily distracted.

If you use your phone as an alarm clock, try to keep it on a dresser or other furniture not directly next to you in bed.

Chapter 4. Natural Remedies for Better Sleep

An awakening has happened, no pun intended, regarding the importance of sleep. Sometimes referred to as the "sleep revolution," people are realizing the necessity of a good night's sleep.

Impaired sleep and insomnia can be extremely detrimental to the human body. The repercussions of sleeping less than five solid hours per night can begin as fatigue, moodiness, and impaired cognitive response. These can quickly escalate into more serious health conditions like weight gain, weakened immune system, and high blood pressure.

Remedies to Improve Your Sleep

There are remedies for nearly everything today; impaired sleep and insomnia included. One can easily find pills at their local drugstore to quickly put them to sleep. The medicinal cocktail contained in these can leave the person feeling even more sleepy or fatigued the next day.

Luckily, there are many natural options to help fall and remain asleep. Herbs, essential oils, bedroom plants, and meditation are all ways to assist with better sleep and offer little to no side effects.

1. Herbs and Herbal Tea

Herbs are a natural and effective alternative to sleeping pills. If you are struggling with falling asleep or staying asleep, it could be affecting your physical or mental health. Before taking chemicals or pills that might make the side effects worse, start with a natural remedy like herbs or herbal tea.

Here are some herbs that are known for helping you to sleep more soundly:

Valerian

Valerian, a crawling plant with small white or pink flowers, is known for its sedative properties. In depth studies have shown that it can lessen the time it takes to fall asleep as well as enhance the quality of sleep. After taking Valerian, dizziness, drowsiness, or difficulty concentrating is possible so it is important to be cautious with this herb.

Chamomile

Chamomile, a member of the daisy family, is another herb widely known for promoting calmness. It has anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties, aiding in a more restful, relaxed sleep. The great thing about chamomile is that it is readily available in a tea, so you can easy make a cup of tea before bed and get much better sleep.

Passionflower

Passionflower, a climbing evergreen plant, is yet another herb recognized for its sedative abilities. It can help with insomnia as well as calming gastrointestinal issues. The calming action in passionflower is very similar to the calming action of benzodiazepines.

If you are losing sleep because you have digestive problems, then this not only will help make you sleepy, but reduce those effects and further help with your sleep disturbances.

Since the FDA considers herbal supplements a food, manufacturers of the supplements do not need to provide proof of safety or efficacy. It is always important to exercise caution when taking any supplement.

2. Essential Oils

Essential oils are another natural and popular alternative for enhancing sleep. Essential oils come directly from different parts of plants, flowers and herbs through an extraction process. They are extremely potent, so they are very effective, but should also be used with caution.

These are the phytonutrients plants themselves use to protect against infections, pests, temperature extremes, and to repair tissue. It makes sense that humans would benefit from them as well. Most of the time, essential oils are used as aromatherapy. They may be spread through a room with an oil diffuser, applied topically, or used in bathwater.

The best essential oils for sleep include:

Lavender

Lavender oil is widely used to promote sleep because it induces relaxation. Not only is this a great herb and herbal tea to use for better sleep, but the essential oils are amazing for you.

An easy way to use lavender for sleep is to add a few drops to an essential oil diffuser that is turned on in your bedroom. The aroma will fill the air and help you to relax during your nighttime routine. If you also take a bath in the evening, you can use lavender in the bath water as well.

Bergamot

Bergamot oil is a citrus, fresh, bittersweet scent that has calming effects. If you are a fan of more citrus scents, use this in the evening to help you get better sleep. This can help you to feel refreshed and reduce stress, which is really going to help you sleep.

Sandalwood and Cedarwood

Sandalwood and Cedarwood oils are both warm, woody scents that help with sleep. All of these oils work on the sense of smell; one of the strongest scents. Since these are a bit strong, it is a good idea to start small with how much you use in your diffuser (or other methods). Add just a couple drops, then see if a little more might be needed.

Vetiver and roman chamomile are some other essential oils that can be wonderful for improved sleep.

3. Dietary Changes

This may not be what you want to hear, but changing your diet might be just what you need. Not only can your diet help to improve your sleep, but other foods might be derailing good sleep.

Here is a look at foods to eat and foods to avoid that can help with your sleep.

What to Eat

Have you ever had a big Thanksgiving dinner with lots of turkey, then felt instantly like having a nap? This is not just from carb overload and being stuffed, but because of the turkey itself.

Turkey has a nutrient called tryptophan that can help make you sleepy. Not only that, it is a healthy protein that will regulate your appetite during the day, so it is always good to have around.

Complex Carbohydrates

Unless you are on a carb-restricted diet, there is nothing wrong with having carbs. However, it is best that you avoid refined carbohydrates like white bread and rice, and stick to your complex carbohydrates, like sweet potatoes and whole wheat. *These carbohydrates go really far in helping to produce serotonin, the sleepy hormone.*

Nutrients You Need in Your Diet

There are many other foods that are nutritious and are going to help you sleep, directly and indirectly. With the right vitamins and minerals in your diet, you have a healthier mindset, healthier body, and less stress.

Some nutrients you should have in your diet include:

B vitamins
Zinc
Calcium
Protein
Iron
Copper
D3

What to Avoid

Naturally, there are also some foods and drinks you want to avoid if you are struggling with insomnia and sleep deprivation. These include:

Caffeine

While you don't have to completely avoid all caffeine, you should at least reduce how much of it you have. This is especially true when it comes to consuming it in the evenings. Many people enjoy coffee at night, but unfortunately this could be affecting your sleep.

Try to reduce all sources of caffeine, including coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate. Even some medications contain caffeine, so it is good to check.

Alcohol

Alcohol can play tricks on you, making you believe you need it to sleep better. While it might help you to fall asleep quickly, it is not helping you to stay asleep or get restful sleep. Your body and mind goes through a lot when you are sleeping after drinking a moderate amount of alcohol, which is why you might feel like you didn't sleep a wink the next morning.

Spicy Foods

As far as food is concerned, reduce how many spicy foods you are consuming. These can affect your digestion, and increase discomfort when you go to sleep. The spicy foods might cause heartburn or acid reflux, which is going to irritate your airway and cause sleep disturbances. If you enjoy spicy food, stick to eating it earlier in the day.

It is also a good idea to reduce acidic foods that irritate acid reflux, such as tomatoes and citrus fruits.

4. Bedroom Plants

Keeping plants in the bedroom is incredibly beneficial to a good night of sleep. Plants help to clean the air, using the carbon dioxide humans exhale. In turn, they provide oxygen.

Lavender

Like its essential oil, a lavender plant induces relaxation. In studies, lavender helped calm crying babies and helped them to sleep. In women's studies, it was shown to lessen the time it took to fall asleep.

Jasmine

A jasmine plant can help to lower anxiety levels for a deeper sleep. It is a delicately scented, busy plant. It is also very beautiful, so it adds to the aesthetics of your bedroom while also improving your sleep.

Snake Plant

Snake plants raise the level of oxygen in the room. They are also known to clean toxins such as formaldehyde, benzene, and trichloroethylene from the air. All of these toxins are commonly found in the home from items like furniture.

Spider Plants

Spider plants also clean formaldehyde from the air, absorbs odors and fumes, and improves the quality of the air. Have at least one or two spider plants in your bedroom to help improve the quality of air, and keep your allergies from disturbing your sleep.

English Ivy and Peace Lily

English Ivy and Peace Lilies help to improve asthma and allergies. They can overpower airborne germs which allows allergy sufferers to get better rest. No more will you be waking up in the middle of the night from an allergy attack.

5. Meditation and Mindfulness

Finally, don't underestimate the power of meditation and mindfulness when it comes to encouraging better sleep.

This might be the easiest natural option because it can be done with or without additional supplies. One can use a guided meditation in which one listens to a person talk them through calming relaxation techniques.

Unguided meditation may be accompanied by a relaxing sound such as rainfall or waves crashing on the beach. This meditation requires concentration to reach a state of ultimate mindfulness.

Practicing meditation along with yoga can help to relax the mind and the body. Yoga includes a series of stretches that assist in preparing the body to sleep. Both can help the practitioner to release the worries and stresses of the day.

Clearly, there are many natural options to help achieve better sleep. Herbs can be useful as long as proper precautions are taken. Essential oils use aromatherapy to help induce calm restfulness.

Plants in the bedroom make a beautiful decoration and offer natural air cleansing. Yoga, along with meditation can help relax and prepare the body for sleep. All of these options are effective alternatives to synthetic sleep aids and most have very little to no side effects.