

10 tips to beat insomnia

Simple lifestyle changes can make a world of difference to your quality of sleep. Follow these 10 tips for a more restful night.

1. Keep regular sleep hours

Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day will programme your body to sleep better. Choose a time when you're likely to feel tired and sleepy.

2. Create a restful sleeping environment

Your bedroom should be a peaceful place for rest and sleep. Temperature, lighting and noise should be controlled so that your bedroom environment helps you to fall (and stay) asleep.

If you have a pet that sleeps in the room with you, consider moving it somewhere else if it often disturbs you in the night.

3. Make sure your bed is comfortable

It's difficult to get restful sleep on a mattress that's too soft or too hard, or a bed that's too small or old.

4. Exercise regularly

Moderate exercise on a regular basis, such as swimming or walking, can help relieve some of the tension built up over the day. Make sure that you don't do vigorous exercise, such as running or the gym, too close to bedtime, though, as it may keep you awake.

5. Cut down on caffeine

Cut down on caffeine in tea, coffee, energy drinks or colas, especially in the evening. Caffeine interferes with the process of falling asleep and also prevents deep sleep. Instead, have a warm, milky drink or herbal tea.

6. Don't over-indulge

Too much food or alcohol, especially late at night, can interrupt your sleep patterns. Alcohol may help you to fall asleep initially, but it will disrupt your sleep later on in the night.

7. Don't smoke

Nicotine is a stimulant. Smokers take longer to fall asleep, they wake up more frequently, and they often have more disrupted sleep.

8. Try to relax before going to bed

Have a warm bath, listen to quiet music or do some gentle yoga to relax the mind and body. Your doctor may be able to recommend a helpful relaxation CD.

9. Write away your worries

If you tend to lie in bed thinking about everything you have to do tomorrow, set aside time before bedtime to make plans for the next day. The aim is to avoid doing these things when you're in bed, trying to sleep.

10. If you can't sleep, get up

If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing until you feel sleepy again, then go back to bed.

If lack of sleep is persistent and affecting your daily life, make an appointment to see your GP.