

# Sleep well

Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to sleep. There are things you can do to get a restful night's sleep.

1. **Avoid exercise 30 minutes before bed.** Regular exercise is important to help you sleep, but working out before bedtime may have the opposite effect. Try exercising in the morning or early afternoon to avoid interference with your night's sleep.
2. **Develop sleep rituals.** It is important to give your body cues that it is time to slow down and sleep. Try listening to relaxing music, reading something soothing for 15 minutes, having a cup of something hot (caffeine free) or do relaxation exercises like yoga.
3. **Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable.** If possible try to sleep in a cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm. If light in the early morning bothers you, cover your window or wear a slumber mask. If noise bothers you, wear earplugs or introduce some "white noise" like a fan.
4. **Stay away from caffeine, nicotine and alcohol at least 4-6 hours before bed.** Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Coffee, tea, coke, chocolate, cigarettes and some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine.
5. **Only use your bed for sleeping.** Refrain from using your bed to watch TV, reading, or school work. This way, when you go to bed your body knows it is time to sleep. Snuggling is an exception to this rule.
6. **Be gentle with yourself when having difficulty falling asleep.** Listen to quiet music or read something boring until you naturally fall asleep. Trying to 'make' yourself sleep almost never works. Remember sleep will come, be patient with yourself in the process. Regardless of when you fall asleep, get up at your regular time.
7. **Have a light snack before bed.** If your stomach is too empty, that can interfere with your sleep. Dairy products contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer. Try having a warm glass of milk before bed if you are worried about falling asleep.



8. **Take a hot bath or shower 90 minutes before bedtime.** A hot bath or shower will raise your body temperature, but it is the drop in your body temperature that may leave you feeling sleepy.
9. **Sleep only when sleepy.** This reduces the time you are awake in bed. If you cannot fall asleep within 15-20 minutes, get up and do something boring until you feel sleepy. Sit quietly in the dark room or read the warranty on your refrigerator. Don't expose yourself to bright light while you are up. The light gives cues to your brain that it is time to wake up.
10. **Try to sleep 6-8 hours every night.** Our bodies can function adequately less hours of sleep, but our brains are not at their best. Getting enough sleep helps you retain and recall information. Remember, one night of getting adequate sleep will not allow you to get "caught up". It is a routine of getting enough sleep that allows you to feel rested and alert during the day.
11. **Try to avoid taking naps.** Avoiding naps will help you be sleeper at bed time. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, sleep less than one hour, before three pm.
12. **Getting up early contributes to better grades.** A study done with university students showed that students who woke up earlier had higher grade point averages.
13. **Avoid clock watching while trying to sleep.** It is unhelpful to stare at your alarm clock if you are having difficulty sleeping. This may keep you awake longer than necessary. Turn the alarm clock around towards the wall to avoid watching the minutes slip away.
14. **Worrying about not sleeping will keep you awake.** Rather than put your focus of attention on the worrying thoughts, notice that they are just thoughts, then put your attention somewhere restful. Tell yourself that worrying about it will not help. If you're worrying about a particular problem, write it down, and tell yourself you can sort it out the morning.
15. **Visit a success coach.** If you would like more information on this topic visit a success coach. To book an appointment, visit the student success office (2nd floor of south campus hall) or call 519-888-4567 ext. 84410.

Adapted from University of Waterloo Counselling Services

