

Considerations for Restful Sleep

Relaxation and/or meditation exercises at the beginning and end of the day are perhaps the most effective way to prevent insomnia.

People with insomnia are often hyper-aroused – pushing, pushing, working to accomplish everything. Turning off the computer *at least* an hour before bedtime can be very helpful for settling your mind enough for sleep. Also, the blue light emitted from any type of screen may trick your brain into thinking it is still daytime.

Use blackout shades or a sleeping mask to make the room as dark as possible. Darkness prompts your brain's pineal gland to make melatonin, especially when contrasted with bright sun exposure during the day. Even 10 to 15 minutes of morning sunlight can be very helpful.

Irregular eating, eating late at night, and excessive consumption of rich, spicy foods can all interrupt or prevent sleep. However, for some people it may be impossible to get to sleep on an empty stomach, so individual evaluation is advisable.

The bedroom should be reserved for sleeping, not mentally stimulating activities such as TV viewing or computer use.

Keep the bedroom temperature between 60 and 68 degrees.

If your logical waking brain is reluctant to let go of anxieties, write down the day's cares (well before bedtime) in a diary, then literally close the book, telling yourself, *I've done my worrying for the day.*

Alcohol tends to cause you to wake up after two or three hours when the sedative effects wear off; this interacts with the first significant REM cycle and disrupts sleep further from there.

Certain yoga postures help initiate sleep, such as Legs Up the Wall, Figure Four, and Forward Bends.

Try a 20-minute soak in a hot bath 90 - 120 minutes before bedtime. The body's effort to cool itself after the bath mimics the cooling that occurs naturally with preparation for sleep.

Relaxation CDs have moved beyond ocean waves; new versions actually have frequencies embedded in the sound tracks to encourage slow-wave sleep.

Sooth yourself if you wake up. If you're waking after only an hour or so, try some boring mental exercise: See if you can name all 50 states alphabetically, or count backward from 100, inhaling deeply and slowly, then exhaling with each number.

If it's close to your usual wake-up time – say it's 5 a.m. and you usually wake at 7 – your core body temperature may be starting to rise for the day, which may make it hard to go back to sleep. Try a positive attitude: *Great! I have two more hours to rest.*

Jeremy Ross' thoughts on sleep, from *Acupuncture Point Combinations*

Sleep is vital to replenish Yin. It is not merely rest in terms of cessation of activity; it is a different form of being. It is an entry into the world of Yin, the world of feeling and intuition, sometimes said to be governed by the right brain. The daytime world is the domain of physical activity and the analytical mind, said to be governed by the left brain.

In the modern world there is enormous emphasis on the development of the rational intellectual mind, and a pressure to maintain ceaseless stressful activity in the outside world. There is a tendency to prolong the day into night. It is rare to find darkness away from artificial lighting, and it is difficult for most people not to carry their daytime mental activity into the world of sleep. This creates a great imbalance between Yin and Yang, with Yang generally increased and Yin greatly reduced, with the daytime world effectively extended far into that of night.

It is not simply a matter of turning off the rational mind at the end of the day, it is also necessary to nourish and develop the intuitive mind and the realm of imagination and feelings. This can only be done when the mind and body are still, by an act of surrender, a letting go of control of control of the analytical mind. This also happens to be the first stage of meditation.

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