

Family Counseling Service: The Importance of Getting A Good Night's Sleep

By Larry Deavers

Sleep is a critical part of our lives. It allows our bodies and our minds to recuperate from the events of the day and re-energizes us for the next. However, in a Consumer Reports survey, 27 percent of U.S. adults said they had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep most nights, and 68 percent—or an estimated 164 million Americans—struggled with sleep at least once a week.

Here are a few ideas to help you increase your chances of getting a good night's rest. Keep in mind that, taken alone, any one of these suggestions will have limited effect; but the more of these you can combine into your daily routine, the greater your chance of success.

1. Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature to help induce sleep. Most sources suggest somewhere between 65 and 70 degrees is best.

2. Reduce as many noise and light distractions as possible, such as indoor pets or unnecessary lights. You may want to wear earplugs or a sleep mask.

3. If you sleep with another person who regularly keeps you awake, consider asking them to make some changes, or consider sleeping in a separate room. Many happily married couples sleep separately due to different schedules or sleep needs.

4. The more you can limit the activities in your bed to sleeping, as opposed to working, texting, or watching TV, the more accustomed your brain will become to moving into sleep mode when you get into bed.

5. Going to sleep and waking up at the same times each day, even on weekends, will keep your body trained

to get sleepy at the right times and wake up at the right times. When you try to catch up on lost sleep over the weekend, it usually throws off your sleep for the coming week.

6. Rituals are also important. The more you can stick to your evening routines that culminate in your going to bed, the more easily you will transition into sleep. This can include some light reading, a warm shower, a cup of decaf coffee, etc.

7. Keep a to-do list nearby so you can jot down the things that come to mind as you are trying to relax. Knowing you now have them on your list will free your mind to relax and not fear you will forget.

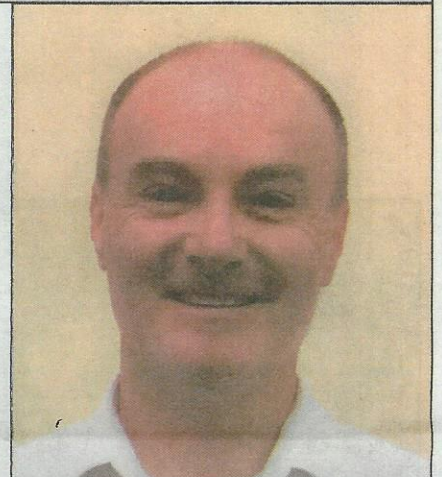
8. Avoid taking any long naps during the day. You may find it helpful to have a 10-15 minute power nap; however, if you sleep for a longer period of time and experience a deep sleep, it may be harder to feel fully wake up later and may inhibit your ability to enter a deep sleep when you are ready for bed.

9. Exercise regularly. Exercise improves the way your body and your brain function, in general, but it also helps you feel more tired when it's time for sleep that night. Just avoid

exercising within three hours of going to bed.

10. Avoid using alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs close to bed time. Nicotine and other stimulants, of course, will help keep you awake. Even alcohol, though you may feel sleepy at first, will cause you to wake up during the night and have difficulty getting back to sleep.

Most importantly: ask for help. If you still have trouble sleeping regularly, reach out to a medical or mental health professional for assistance.



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