

## Sleep Hygiene – “The Healthy Habits of Good Sleep”

Good “hygiene” is anything that helps you to have a healthy life. The idea behind sleep hygiene is the same as dental hygiene. Dental hygiene helps you stay healthy by keeping your teeth and gums clean and strong. Sleep hygiene helps you stay healthy by keeping your mind and body rested and strong.

Following these tips will help you sleep better and feel your best. Dental hygiene can even be a part of your sleep hygiene. It is easier for you to fall asleep at night if you have bedtime “rituals.” These are things that you do every night just before going to bed. Brushing and flossing your teeth is a good example of this kind of ritual. Both your dentist and your doctor will approve if you do this every night.

Here are some tips for how you can improve your sleep hygiene:

- **Don’t go to bed unless you are sleepy.**  
If you are not sleepy at bedtime, then do something else. Read a book, listen to soft music or browse through a magazine. Find something relaxing, but not stimulating, to take your mind off of worries about sleep. This will relax your body and distract your mind.
- **If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, then get out of the bed.**  
Find something else to do that will make you feel relaxed. If you can, do this in another room. Your bedroom should be where you go to sleep. It is not a place to go when you are bored. Once you feel sleepy again, go back to bed.
- **Begin rituals that help you relax each night before bed.**  
This can include such things as a warm bath, light snack or a few minutes of reading.
- **Get up at the same time every morning.**  
Do this even on weekends and holidays.
- **Get a full night’s sleep on a regular basis.**  
Get enough sleep so that you feel well-rested nearly every day.
- **Avoid taking naps if you can.**  
If you must take a nap, try to keep it short (less than one hour). Never take a nap after 3 p.m.
- **Keep a regular schedule.**  
Regular times for meals, medications, chores, and other activities help keep the inner body clock running smoothly.
- **Don’t read, write, eat, watch TV, talk on the phone, or play cards in bed.**
- **Do not have any caffeine after lunch.**
- **Do not have a beer, a glass of wine, or any other alcohol within six hours of your bedtime.**
- **Do not have a cigarette or any other source of nicotine before bedtime.**
- **Do not go to bed hungry, but don’t eat a big meal near bedtime either.**
- **Avoid any tough exercise within six hours of your bedtime.**  
You should exercise on a regular basis, but do it earlier in the day. (Talk to your doctor before you begin an exercise program.)
- **Avoid sleeping pills, or use them cautiously.**  
Most doctors do not prescribe sleeping pills for periods of more than three weeks. Do not drink alcohol while taking sleeping pills.
- **Try to get rid of or deal with things that make you worry.**  
If you are unable to do this, then find a time during the day to get all of your worries out of your system. Your bed is a place to rest, not a place to worry.
- **Make your bedroom quiet, dark, and a little bit cool.**  
An easy way to remember this: it should remind you of a cave. While this may not sound romantic, it seems to work for bats. Bats are champion sleepers. They get about 16 hours of sleep each day. Maybe it’s because they sleep in dark, cool caves.