

SLEEP HYGEINE

AUArts Counselling

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Sleep helps to repair and restore the body's resources, which allows us to better meet our demands. In addition to fatigue, poor sleep contributes to difficulties concentrating, poor metabolism, irritability, and moodiness. It has also been shown to be a factor in workplace and motor vehicle accidents.

Sleep hygiene involves routines and habits that promote a more restful and restorative sleep. These habits make it easier to fall asleep and get back to sleep if we wake during the night.

Habits during the Day

- Set a regular schedule. Go to bed and get up around the same time each night, even on weekends. Shifting your bed and wake time is like travelling to a different time zone and affects your body's natural circadian rhythm. Keeping a regular schedule will allow your body to get tired and fall asleep better each night.
- Avoid naps. Although you should get rest when you need it, napping also disrupts the sleep-wake cycle. If you simply cannot stay awake, try keeping your nap to less than 30 minutes.
- Don't go to bed hungry. Low blood sugar can make it difficult to fall asleep and can also contribute to waking during the night. Try having a very light snack with protein (e.g., a few spoons of yogurt) before bed.
- Don't eat heavy, greasy, spicy, or sugary foods before bed. These foods can spike energy levels and/or make for digestive discomforts that also interfere with sleep.
- Exercise regularly but not too close to bed. Exercise releases chemicals in the brain that are also associated with energy. Try not to exercise within a few hours of your bedtime.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before bed. Although it is a "sedative," alcohol affects the body's ability to achieve deeper, REM sleep. The same amount of sleep without REM does not feel as restful.

- Avoid caffeine for at least 6 hours before bed. Caffeine is a stimulant, which stays in the body for several hours. The more you drink throughout the day, the longer it takes for the body to metabolize it. For some, it can affect the achievement of fatigue for up to 12 hours.

Before Bed

- Develop a routine. Brush teeth, wash face, etc. in the same order each night.
- Move towards calm. At least an hour before you plan to fall asleep, stop working, watching television, etc. Turn down or off the lights – light signals to the brain that it is time to be awake.
- If you find that worry and thought interferes with you falling asleep, set aside time to jot down worries, plans for the next day, ideas for your next assignment, etc. Do not dwell on the thoughts, write them down and move on.
- Next, engage in a calming ritual – meditation, relaxation methods, having a bath, etc. The calming ritual/activity should not involve technology (e.g., texting, checking Facebook, searching online, etc.). These activities, while not usually “stressful” are still stimulating to the brain and do not usually help us to fall asleep.

Your Sleep Environment

- Use your bed for sleep. Do not make your bed – or even your bedroom, if possible – a place where you do homework, read, watch television shows/ movies, surf the internet, talk on the phone, use social media, etc. The more you can learn to associate your bed with the place you sleep, the clearer your mind will be with the purpose of being there.
- Ensure that your bedroom is as dark as possible.
- Ensure that your bedroom is as quiet as possible.
- Ensure your bedroom is at a temperature conducive to sleep. Keep your room between 18 to 23 degrees C.
- Ensure that your bed and bedding (pillows, blankets, etc.) are as comfortable as possible.

If you Wake during the Night

- As soon as you notice you are awake, try to get back to sleep. This is not a time to ponder or get up.
- If you move at all, move once and move gently.
- Do not turn on the light.
- Use relaxation techniques
- Breathe. Count your breaths.
- Repeat a mantra. “Everything is as it should be right now.”
- Repeat a monotonous word “the, the, the.”
- Conjure a calming, quieting, comforting image
- If you cannot fall back to sleep with the above methods for about 15 minutes. Get up slowly. Do not turn on the light. Simply stand near your bed in the dark and attend to your body. Notice how heavy it feels. Allow yourself to become drowsy and sleepy again. Get back into bed.
- If this doesn't work either, you may want to leave the bedroom. Tossing and turning in bed will only solidify your association between bed and restlessness. Try to avoid engaging in anything too stimulating and try to get back to sleep as quickly as possible.

If your sleep troubles persist, contact AUArts Student Counselling or a physician.

Student Counselling Office

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