

# RECOVER

THE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR ANYONE LIVING WITH ADDICTION

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**WHY ISN'T WILLPOWER  
ALONE ENOUGH?**

**LOSE YOUR BAD  
SLEEP HABITS**

**COMMUNITY:  
The Heart and Soul  
of Recovery**

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## **“Sleep Hygiene for Health” *RECOVER* by Jeffrey Rose, Clinical Hypnotist**

Sleep for better health is important for everyone. With knowledge of proper sleep hygiene, new behaviors and habits can be incorporated in your life that promote, rather than disrupt, a healthy sleeping pattern.

One of the first rules is to establish a regular schedule of going to sleep each night, including the weekend. Of course, there will be times when you are out late and enjoying some activity, but when possible you should go to bed on the weekends at the same time as you always do. As part of the process of getting into bed at the same time each night, you should get into the habit of doing things that you know will make you more relaxed. Lowering the lights in your home a while before going to bed is helpful to the physiological process and hormonal change your body must undergo to make you feel drowsy and ready to sleep. Psychologically, you can help this process by listening to music that relaxes you and alleviates the stress of the day. On the other hand, listening to the news just before getting into bed, although common in our society, is not recommended as it can create anxiety and stress. In addition, you should avoid getting into conflicts before bed, for example, bringing up subjects that create tension between you and a person you are living with or with someone to whom you are talking on the phone at night. It is best to push these contentious discussions to another day rather than to get into them before you go to sleep. If there are any life or work problems that are preoccupying you, do not use the time before sleep to go over them. All of these things may make it more difficult to fall asleep, and even disrupt the quality of your sleep during the night.

Some people believe that having a cup of warm caffeine-free herbal tea is a good way to relax you and make you even more ready for bed, and along with listening to relaxing music and lowering the lights, will let their mind know that it is time to get ready to go to sleep. On the other hand, some people feel you should not drink anything in the few hours before going to bed as this may require you to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, and it is better to sleep through the night uninterrupted. Each person is different, so one must see how having a cup of tea will affect the uninterrupted continuity of your sleep. It is best that you sleep through the night without getting up to go to the bathroom. It is important to limit your intake of fluids the closer you get to your bedtime so that you will have a greater chance of sleeping through the night without getting up.

Many of you may want to employ even more powerful methods of relaxation. For example, you could do some meditation or listen to a recording of a program specifically designed to guide you into a more relaxed state. For those of you who have never incorporated such things in your life, you may be surprised at how beneficial such things can be. It is certainly worth trying if you have never done so.

Many people relax after a busy day by taking a warm bath in the evening. You can even add things to the water, in particular scents that you find relaxing. You can read more about this by looking into aromatherapy. Some people find particular aromas and the smells of certain essential oils very relaxing and stress reducing. A lot of scientific research has shown that certain aromas do in fact relax people. For health reasons, it is important to use aromas from natural sources rather than using artificially created chemicals.

You need to establish a regular routine for going to bed as the mind and body will respond to this as a cue for falling asleep. Don't snack before going to bed, especially on grains and sugars, which will make your blood sugar shoot up and block sleep. Later, if you do get to sleep, your blood sugar may

drop too low as a rebound reaction to the high sugar at bedtime and further disrupt sleep by waking you up and keeping you from falling back to sleep again. Some people go to sleep easier if they wear socks to bed: Because of the nature of the body's circulation system, the feet can often get cold and this can interfere with proper sleep.

Part of the concept of creating a sleep schedule to regularize sleep is waking up at the same time each day. This is important because it has a strong influence on the whole sleep cycle and sleeping late may disrupt the ability to fall asleep later that night at your regular time. You have probably experienced this effect yourself. If you have not been getting enough sleep during the week, sleeping late on the weekends will help make up for what is referred to as your sleep debt. However, this is just a temporary remedy to ongoing poor sleep habits and will neither promote resolving sleep disturbances nor enable you to sleep in a normal healthy manner. Everyone is different, but 8 to 9 hours of sleep per night is the best amount for most people. Some can sleep less without any negative effects, and some require even more sleep, but the average of 6.5 hours per night that many are getting is not at all adequate. Experts say that if you feel drowsy during the day, even during boring activities, you haven't had enough sleep. Research has shown that those living in developed countries have reduced their average sleep time from 9 hours earlier in the century to 7.5 hours. This is because of the electric light and the desire for people to make more room in their life for both work and leisure time. Another important part of establishing a regular cycle of sleep is not napping during the day. Napping disrupts the normal cycle of sleep, preventing you from establishing the healthy sleep pattern of getting a good night's rest each day. It is not a proper solution to sleep disturbances at night.

You should, of course, avoid any food in the evening that can stimulate you, such as caffeinated coffee or tea and cigarettes. Even large amounts of chocolate can affect one's sleep.

It is best to avoid taking medications for sleep as their effect will only be temporary and in the end they will leave you with the same or worse sleeping problems. Most of them do not create normal healthy sleeping patterns and so in the end they are highly disruptive to ever getting back to normal, healthy sleeping patterns. In addition, these types of drugs often lead to drowsiness during the day and for this reason cannot be considered a good solution to sleep problems. Getting regular exercise during the day definitely acts to promote better sleep at night. Become more physically active. One way is to incorporate more walking into your life. You can go to a fitness center for a workout, but don't exercise too close to bedtime as this can definitely interfere with the winding down process necessary to fall asleep.

Another thing you can do to promote sleep later in the day is to get sunlight or bright light on your face as early as possible. This will act to reset the normal natural cycles of the body for the rest of the day and night. It is light and your exposure to it that keeps the body within its normal daily cycles of wakefulness and sleep. Some scientists feel that electric lighting, in the evening after the sun has gone down, interferes with the normal working of these natural cycles. That is why it is suggested that you slowly lower the lighting in your home in the evening, the closer you get to the time you wish to fall asleep. Of course, you should keep your sleeping area as dark as possible, so no stimulating light interferes with the sleeping cycle. To this end, you might try to eliminate all ambient light by removing from your room anything glowing, and by getting special shades or drapes that keep light from coming inside your bedroom window. Some people may not feel comfortable being in a dark room, and it may not be safe for older people susceptible to falls. In that case, get eye shields to wear in bed and they will have the same effect. In addition, if there is noise intruding in

your sleeping area wear ear plugs. On the other hand, some people can sleep better if they listen to white noise. You can buy a machine that offers a variety of sounds to play in the night and perhaps one of them will enhance your sleep experience.

Light early in the day is instrumental to getting proper sleep later on. On the other hand, light is disruptive toward sleep time and during sleep. In this regard, you should also avoid being exposed to bright light if you happen to wake up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. Light is one of the signals to your brain that it is time to get up, and changes the hormones that are produced by your body while you are in a sleeping state. It is preferable that you refrain from turning on bright lights and use a dim nightlight while using the bathroom. If you are comfortable with even less light, you can use a colored bulb that is specifically designed for use in a nightlight.

If you are unable to sleep, get up, go into another room, and do something relaxing. Watching television or a recorded film before you go to bed and when you get up in the middle of the night is not a good idea at all for two reasons. First, it is a strong light source that can stimulate your body to refrain from producing the hormones necessary for the sleep process. Second, it can be too mentally stimulating, especially if you watch an anxiety-producing news show or an exciting film. Don't do any work for your job in the middle of the night, either. This will be too stimulating and may create stress and tension. You may grow more tired missing sleep and staying up through the night watching TV, but at the same time you will be doing something that keeps you psychologically and physiologically awake. (Some people actually misjudge their insomnia.) For example, your partner may tell you you were asleep, while your subjective experience is one of being up all the time, unable to sleep. Sometimes we feel like we were lying in bed for, say, fifteen minutes trying to go to sleep, but when we look at a clock it says we've been in bed for a few hours, much more than our subjective impression. In those cases, it is best not to get up out of bed, but continue along the way you've been going. One thing you can do in this situation is just tell yourself that you are going to just rest in bed, without trying or straining to actually go to sleep. This often allows you to have more of those imperceptible sleep periods. Of course, this is far from ideal, but it helps keep such a difficult night from being more of a loss. It is recommended that you remove your clock from view, both to cut out any extra light and because for some people watching their clock through the night can make trying to get sleep even more stressful.)

Your bedroom should only be used for sleep and romance. Don't do work or watch television in your bedroom. If you do, your place of sleep will be connected in your mind with things that are the opposite of rest, relaxation, and peace and instead be associated with things that create anxiety and stress.

Sometimes, people experience sleep problems but overlook more obvious improvements that can be made to improve their sleep experience. For example, their room may be either too cool or too hot. It may be stuffy and lack proper ventilation. People who live in homes may keep their upstairs bedrooms too hot as the heat generated in the lower floor travels upward. If your bedroom temperature is higher than 70 degrees, it might help to try to keep it lower at night. Your mattress may be either too soft or too hard. Different people may sleep more comfortably on different mattresses. It is important for everyone to pay attention to these things and experiment with changes in their sleeping situation to create the most favorable conditions to achieve a satisfactory night of sleep. In addition, there are pillows in various shapes and made out of various materials, any one of which may allow you to get a better night's rest.

Your way of waking up in the morning can be changed so that you can retain more of the restorative effects of a good night's sleep as you get up. Using a loud alarm clock is startling and suddenly disrupts your sleep in a stressful manner. A more gentle alarm, even one that turns on a radio to relaxing music, is better. But, it is most preferable to get up in the morning by using a device that simulates the rising sun. These are called dawn simulators and they will give you a much easier and healthier way of waking up each morning.

I am frequently called on to help people overcome sleep disturbances, in particular insomnia.

Hypnosis has proved to be a powerful modality for improving sleep, especially for its ability to guide the subconscious mind to end negative thought patterns that have been creating stress and anxiety at bedtime and thus enable individuals to relax and go to sleep. In addition, hypnotherapy can change underlying attitudes and beliefs within the subconscious regarding sleep that were promoting sleep difficulties such as "I always have trouble going to sleep" or "I never can get a good night's rest."

Regardless of the nature of your sleeping problems, concrete steps can be undertaken that can make important contributions to improving your sleep. Perhaps you are someone who has never tried meditation or listening to a recording specifically designed to create relaxation. Perhaps you have never listened to a noise machine that makes white noise or the sound of waves at a beach. Perhaps you are someone who has used the same type of mattress your entire life. If you are someone who is experiencing sleep difficulties, it is time to begin experimenting with taking a different approach to your whole sleep experience.