

# How to Get to Sleep

## Establish a bedtime routine

If you have difficulty falling asleep, a regular bedtime routine will help you wind down and prepare for bed.

Few people manage to stick to strict bedtime routines. This isn't much of a problem for most people, but for insomniacs, irregular sleeping hours are unhelpful.

Your routine depends on what works for you, but the most important thing is working out a routine and sticking to it.

## Sleep at regular times

First of all, keep regular sleeping hours. This programmes the brain and internal body clock to get used to a set routine.

Most adults need between six and nine hours of sleep every night. By working out what time you need to wake up, you can set a regular bedtime schedule.

## Make sure you wind down

Winding down is a critical stage in preparing for bed. There are lots of ways to relax:

- A warm bath (not hot) will help your body reach a temperature that's ideal for rest.
- Writing "to do" lists for the next day can organise your thoughts and clear your mind of any distractions.
- Relaxation exercises, such as light **yoga stretches**, help to relax the muscles. Don't exercise vigorously, as it will have the opposite effect.
- Relaxation CDs work by using a carefully narrated script, gentle hypnotic music and sound effects to relax you.
- Reading a book or listening to the radio relaxes the mind by distracting it.

If you need more ideas, you can get help and advice from your GP.

## Make your bedroom sleep-friendly

Your bedroom should be a relaxing environment. Experts claim there's a strong association in people's minds between sleep and the bedroom.

However, certain things weaken that association, such as TVs and other electronic gadgets, light, noise, and a bad mattress or bed.

Your bedroom ideally needs to be dark, quiet, tidy and be kept at a temperature of between 18C and 24C.

Fit some thick curtains if you don't have any. If you're disturbed by noise, consider investing in double glazing or, for a cheaper option, use earplugs.

## Keep a sleep diary

It can be a good idea to keep a sleep diary. It may uncover lifestyle habits or daily activities that contribute to your sleeplessness.

If you see your GP or a sleep expert they will probably ask you to keep a sleep diary to help them diagnose your sleep problems. So taking one you've already done with you could save time.

A sleep diary can also reveal underlying conditions that explain your insomnia, such as stress or medication.

Tips taken from, 'How to Get to Sleep', NHS Choices, last accessed 21 March, 2017,  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia/Pages/bedtimeritual.aspx>.