How to sleep better at night -
sleep hygiene

Information for anyone having trouble sleeping
Aim for a good night’s sleep

A good night’s sleep should be:

- uninterrupted
- refreshing
- a deep sleep
- a length of time that works for you personally (the average adult needs 7.5 to 8 hours per night). Remember that some people may need much less than this. If you are not feeling tired during the day you are probably getting as much sleep as you need.

Your environment

The room should be:

- **dark** - avoid lights, including night-lights. Keep the windows covered with blinds or curtains thick enough to keep out the light
- **cool** - keep the temperature of your sleep environment cool enough to necessitate bedding for warmth
- **quiet** - falling asleep and staying asleep is much easier if your environment is quiet. Use earplugs or a “white noise machine” (which produces random sounds that can sound like a waterfall, or wind blowing through trees) if you cannot control the noise level in your sleep environment
- **comfortable** - make sure you are sleeping on a comfortable mattress. A good mattress will support your back and will not leave you feeling stiff and sore in the morning.
**Things to consider**

**Pain** - If you are in pain you will not sleep. You should ask for your doctor’s advice on effective pain relief.

**Certain physical problems such as breathing difficulties** - If you feel this may be a problem see your doctor.

**Certain mental health problems such as depression** - Again if you feel you may be suffering from a problem such as depression see your doctor.

**Certain medications** - Some medications have side-effects associated with not sleeping (insomnia). This is also the case for certain herbal remedies. Make sure you read the information provided and consult your doctor or pharmacist - **do not just stop taking the medication.**

**Do not:**

Consume alcohol before bed. Alcohol may make it easier to fall asleep but it is at the cost of quality. Alcohol fragments your sleep, so you will not feel well rested even after a full night’s sleep. Alcohol will increase the chances of you needing to pass urine during the night and may cause you to wake early.
Do’s:

- Have a bedtime ritual. This sends a cue to your body that it is time to settle down and fall asleep. A ritual does not have to be a long process and can be as simple as brushing your teeth and reading for 15 minutes.

- Keep a regular sleeping pattern. This allows your body’s biological clock to take care of your ability to fall asleep and ensures that you will be alert during the appropriate times of the day. Remember, lying in bed late in the morning will have a knock on effect on what time your body is ready to sleep at night.

- Have a light snack or warm milky drink before bed, but avoid any drink containing caffeine (this includes tea, coffee and cola) as caffeine is a stimulant, which will keep you awake. A light snack will let you sleep soundly through the night without waking up from hunger pangs. Be careful though, eating a heavy meal before going to bed will make it difficult to fall asleep.
Do’s:

- Unwind earlier in the evening. Take the time early in the evening to relax your body and mind. Falling asleep can be almost impossible if your mind is racing, working through problems, weighing decisions and reviewing the day past or upcoming. A calm, clear mind is necessary for a relaxed body.

- Take a warm bath before going to bed. Warm baths raise your body’s temperature. After the bath your body cools off and this cooling is what makes you sleepy.
Don’ts:

Stay up too late. By staying up late you are liable to get a “second wind” which will make it difficult for you to fall asleep even if it is late.

Eat a large or heavy meal before bed. Heartburn, indigestion, and the need to urinate are counterproductive and end up disturbing your sleep.

Do things other than sleeping in bed (e.g. watching TV, working, etc.).

Have caffeine before bed. Caffeine is a stimulant that keeps you awake.

Smoke cigarettes. The nicotine found in cigarettes is a stimulant and will interfere with your body’s ability to fall asleep.
Don’ts:

Exercise directly before bedtime. Exercise is healthy and can be very helpful if you do it several hours before going to sleep. Don’t exercise just before bedtime since the natural high produced from exercise will inhibit your ability to fall asleep immediately.

Force yourself to fall asleep. If you cannot fall asleep after 30 minutes, it is wise to get up and do something that is not stimulating. Forcing yourself to lie there will only frustrate you and take you even farther from your goal of sleep.

Have daytime naps. Avoid daytime naps because they stagger your body’s biological rhythm. By taking naps, you might not be tired at bedtime and this will encourage you to stay up later. If you don’t go to bed at a reasonable hour, you might feel tired the next day and opt for another daytime nap, which establishes a vicious cycle. If it is necessary to take a nap, sleep for less than one hour before 3 pm.
If you need this information in another language or format please telephone 0116 295 0994 or email: Patient.Information@leicspart.nhs.uk

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