

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

SLEEP HYGIENE



Many Americans maintain a serious sleep debt by failing to get enough sleep each night. Often, people are sleep deprived without realizing it. College students need on average 8-9 hours of sleep per night. Deep sleep is necessary for problem solving, reasoning and consolidating information. Many factors can affect your sleep quality, some of which cannot be controlled. However, you can adopt certain habits to encourage better sleep.

GENERAL TIPS FOR QUALITY SLEEP

- **Keep a sleep schedule.** Try to fall asleep and wake up at the same time every day to keep your body in its natural rhythm.
- **Sleep in a continuous block.** People need long periods of uninterrupted sleep.
- **Keep naps short.** A 15-20 minute nap can increase alertness and productivity, but an hour long nap will make you go into deeper sleep and you can wake up feeling worse.
- **Exercise daily.** Physical exercise results in a more restful sleep.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **Sleep medications** can be used on occasion; however, prolonged use can cause dependence and reduced effectiveness. Many over the counter sleep aids contain antihistamines and can cause residual drowsiness the same day. Melatonin is a hormone that regulates your sleep cycle. Melatonin supplements can be bought over the counter and can help treat sleep disorders.
- **If you have noticed problems with snoring,** gasping or abrupt awakening, this may be a sign of sleep apnea, which is strongly associated with poor sleep and daytime sleepiness. Speak with your provider if you are concerned you have sleep apnea.
- **If you are falling asleep during normal activities,** you may have a more serious sleep disorder like narcolepsy or cataplexy. Speak with your healthcare provider if you are concerned you have one of these conditions.

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/melatonin/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379>

WHAT TO DO

- Create a calming environment before bed by making sure your room is quiet, cool and dark.
- Try relaxing by taking a hot bath, reading a book or meditating.
- If something is stressful and preventing you from relaxing, try to write it down to get it off your mind.
- Try drinking a warm, non-alcoholic non-stimulant drink such as herbal tea.
- If you toss and turn for more than 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something else until you feel sleepy again.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not do non-sleep activities such as homework in your bed. Reserve your bed for sleep or other relaxing activities.
- Do not use screens right before bed. Blue light from digital screens suppresses melatonin production, fueling wakefulness.
- Do not eat heavy meals right before bed.
- Do not exercise within 3 hours of going to sleep because exercise fuels alertness.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine within 8-10 hours before sleep.
- Avoid alcohol within 3 hours of bedtime because it is very disruptive to normal sleep patterns.



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The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Clinic: 205-934-3580

After Hours: 205-934-3411

<https://www.uab.edu/students/health/>

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