

Sleep Easily

**CHEAT
SHEET**



Flourish Therapy's Healthy Sleep Tips Cheat Sheet

Healthy Sleep

Sleep is one of the cornerstones of good health. On average an adult needs between 6-8 hours of sleep a night. Here are a few tips to help you to sleep well and wake up feeling refreshed and well-rested:

Fill those lungs!

Learn how to deep breath! Oxygen plays a crucial role in all chemical reactions in the body from releasing cellular energy to fuel our organs to keeping our mind sharp and skin clear and youthful looking.

When you inhale deeply, you are boosting the cleansing action of your lymphatic system which carries away poisons from the body for excretion. The lymphatic system relies upon breathing to pump lymph around the body, and a body free of toxins, is a healthy way to prime for a good night's sleep.

Vagus Nerve

Deep breathing stimulates the vagus nerve which runs from the brain all the way down through to the abdomen. Stimulation of the vagus nerve reduces the heartbeat, blood pressure and relieves stress. We can't be relaxed and anxious at the same time, can we?

Stimulation of the vagus nerve has such a positive effect on the body that it forms part of the treatment for clients with depression and anxiety related disorders. So, how do we deep breath?!

Deep Breathing Exercises

1. Lie down or sit in a comfortable chair, maintaining good posture. Your body should be as relaxed as possible. Close your eyes. Scan your body for tension.
2. Pay attention to your breathing. Place one hand on the part of your chest or abdomen that seems to rise and fall the most with each breath. If this spot is in your chest you are not utilizing the lower part of your lungs.
3. Place both hands on your abdomen and follow your breathing, noticing how your abdomen rises and falls.

4. Breathe in through your nose.
5. Notice if your chest is moving in harmony with your abdomen.
6. Now place one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest.
7. Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose into your abdomen. You should feel your abdomen rise with this inhalation and your chest should move only a little. Try and breathe in for six seconds, hold the breath for 12, and if you can do, exhale for the count of 10. Practice makes perfect with this technique.
8. Exhale through your mouth, keeping your mouth, tongue, and jaw relaxed.
9. Relax as you focus on the sound and feeling of long, slow, deep breaths.
10. Aim to practice these exercises in the morning and before going to bed. You will experience a noticeable shift in how relaxed you are feeling as well as improved feelings of well-being.

Avoid caffeine

Avoid caffeine (tea, coffee, carbonated drinks) from mid-afternoon onwards. Ideally drink only water in the afternoon and evening, or herbal tea such as Sleepy Tea by Clipper (you can find it in most supermarkets) which is a specially formulated blend of herbs designed to encourage a healthy night's sleep. Chamomile tea is also known for its sleep-inducing properties.

Avoid sugary foods

Avoid sugary foods for a minimum of three hours before bed. Elevated blood sugar levels can leave your body feeling anxious and result in erratic sleep patterns.

Avoid excessive alcohol

Avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol before bed. Heavy alcohol drinking impacts negatively on general health, but many people enjoy a glass or two in the evening of their favourite tipple. This is fine, but don't go overboard. Too much alcohol will fragment your sleep and make you feel drowsy the following day.

Avoid strenuous exercise

Avoid strenuous exercise for a minimum of three hours before bedtime. Exercise activates the adrenal glands and the production of cortisol, a stress-inducing hormone which alerts our fight and flight response. Deep breathing can help lower the levels of cortisol in the blood stream, leading to improved relaxation.

Turn off the lights

Sleep in a dark room. Turn off landing lights, turn alarm clocks away from the bed and anything that may transmit a light. If you have a lit digital alarm, avoid at all costs, the blue or green displays. If you have the option of red or orange, these are less interrupting. The blue and green displays affect our natural circadian rhythm.

Ideally exclude television an hour before bed and do something less stimulating such as reading or listening to relaxing music, or cuddle up!

Reading in bed with a low wattage night light can be a good way to make the transition into sleep time preparation. If you do read, make sure it's something that doesn't stimulate you too much!

Black-out curtains

Use black-out curtains to make the most of your night's sleep during the spring and summer months.

Even through shut eyes, the optical nerve will pick up light and pass it directly to the hypothalamus, the part of our brain which controls our biological clock. Our skin also is full of light receptors which signal the body to wake when light is available.

Hormones

If we are disturbed by light during the night hours, our pineal gland's production of melatonin and serotonin can be disrupted.

Melatonin is a hormone and an antioxidant. Among its many uses in the body, melatonin secretion is highest during the darkest hours and helps to promote good sleep.

Serotonin is a hormone which regulates our moods and we need a healthy amount to keep us feeling fresh, happy and balanced.

To help with melatonin and serotonin production, if you have a source of protein for your evening meal, eat a small piece of fruit shortly afterwards which will help the L-tryptophan (an amino acid found in protein) to cross your blood/brain barrier.

One of the best ways to boost melatonin production is to make sure you get a minimum of 30 minutes UV exposure every day, as well as regular exercise. Midday sun (so long as you're not burning) is the best for melatonin stimulation, but any is better than none.

Keep cool

Keep your bedroom cool – no warmer than 68°F / 20°C. A cool bedroom is conducive to getting a better night's sleep. Wearing socks in bed has been proven to promote a good night's sleep too.

Create healthy sleeping habits

Finally! Stick to a regular pattern, even at the weekends. This allows your sleeping to become a habit. The neural pathways in the brain will establish it as such, and within 30 days, with good sleep habits, you should be well on your way to sleeping success. This means going to bed at a similar time every night and getting up at a similar time every day. It **WILL** help in the long run.

In a nutshell:

- Practice deep breathing exercises
- Avoid sugar, caffeine and alcohol
- Avoid strenuous exercise
- Avoid bright lights
- Sleep in a dark room
- Let your hormones do what they need to do naturally
- Keep your room cool
- Build your healthy sleeping habit

And sweet dreams!

