

How Clean is Your Sleep Hygiene?

Does sleep feel like a luxury, easily sacrificed for work, family obligations, Netflix binging, or endless scrolling? Neglecting sleep can make you feel groggy and leads to poor sleep habits, which in turn contribute to fatigue. It's a vicious cycle that impacts your mood, motivation, cognitive function, and long-term health¹.

Think of sleep as a daily deposit into your energy bank. When you consistently sacrifice sleep, you accumulate a "sleep debt." This debt makes it harder to concentrate, regulate emotions, and even perform basic tasks efficiently². While the recommended 7-9 hours of quality sleep for adults is a crucial target, sleep hygiene encompasses the set of practices and habits necessary to promote quality sleep and maximize alertness during your awake hours. Sleep hygiene is about teaching your body and brain that bedtime means rest, not just a pause in activity.

The key to combating fatigue through clean sleep hygiene lies in consistency. Your brain thrives on routine, and by establishing a predictable sequence of events leading up to bedtime, you create powerful cues that signal your brain that it's time to wind down. Here's how to build a robust and consistent sleep routine:

- **Prioritize consistent sleep schedules every day**, even on weekends. This helps regulate your body's circadian rhythm. While deviations are inevitable, especially for shift workers, strive for consistency as much as possible.
- **Gently disengage from stimulating activities** for at least 30-60 minutes before your scheduled bedtime to signal to your brain that the day's demands are winding down.
 - Power down all electronic devices at least an hour before bed. The blue light emitted from smartphones, computers, and even TVs can suppress melatonin production – the hormone that tells your body it's time to sleep.
 - If your mind is racing with to-do lists, worries, or brilliant ideas, keep a notepad by your bed and spend a few minutes jotting down anything that's on your mind. This "brain dump" can help quiet mental chatter.
 - Engage in a calming activity like reading a book (not on a backlit device), listening to calm music or a podcast, taking a warm shower, or practicing meditation or deep breathing exercises.

- **Optimize Your Sleep Environment.**

- Dim the lights, or if sleeping during daytime hours, close the room darkening shades or use a comfortable sleep mask. Eliminating bright light helps reinforce the natural signal to your brain that it's time to prepare for sleep.
- Minimize noise disturbances with earplugs, white noise machines, or even a fan.
- Keep it cool. Most people sleep best in a cool room, typically between 60-67°F (15-19°C).

- **Other Considerations:**

- Avoid heavy meals, excessive caffeine, and alcohol close to bedtime. While alcohol might make you feel drowsy initially, it can disrupt sleep quality later in the night.
- Physical activity can significantly improve sleep quality, but avoid intense workouts too close to your scheduled sleep time, as they can be stimulating.
- If you need to nap before bedtime, keep it short (20-30 minutes) and avoid naps close to bedtime, as they can interfere with scheduled sleep.

Establishing a solid sleep routine takes commitment and patience. It's not easy, and it won't happen overnight. By consciously signaling your brain to settle down for rest, you'll find yourself falling asleep more easily, sleeping more soundly, and waking up feeling refreshed. Breaking the cycle of fatigue starts with prioritizing your sleep, one consistent bedtime routine at a time.



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¹ Breaking the Cycle of Chronic Exhaustion, and Sleeping Better, Helena Rempala, PhD, Ohio State University, <https://health.osu.edu/health/mental-health/breaking-chronic-exhaustion-cycle>, February 18, 2025.

² Sleep Deprivation, Cleveland Clinic, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23970-sleep-deprivation>, accessed August 20, 2025.