

Relaxation Tips for Better Sleep

Everyone has trouble falling asleep from time to time. Establishing a bedtime routine, avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening, and turning off the TV and smartphone can help prevent sleep issues. However, on those nights when you just can't fall asleep, there are some other techniques that can help quiet mind and body and ease you into slumber. Try the following techniques:

Deep Breathing

Breathing from our chests or shoulders can create more tension and stress by preventing air from reaching the bottom of our lungs. Deep breathing focuses on using the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) to draw slow, deep breaths of air into the lungs and to release them slowly.

Stretching and Yoga

Stress often appears as tension in our necks, shoulders and head, what's commonly referred to as the stress triangle. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Yoga is a more formal method of stretching, but even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times can have positive effects.

Massage

Physically, massage can help alleviate tense muscles, lower blood pressure, promote deep breathing and improve posture. Mental benefits of massage include reduced anxiety, increased body awareness and enhanced creativity.

Meditation and Visualization

Meditation involves "quieting the mind" by blocking out sensory input and distraction, while visualization involves using the brain's creative capacity to create a stress-free experience, much like daydreaming. Both meditation and visualization can be helpful in relieving stress.

Additional Tips for Good Sleep:

- Get up about the same time every day and maintain a regular schedule.
- Go to bed only when tired. If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing.
- Establish pre-sleep rituals, such as a warm bath, a light bedtime snack or 10 minutes of reading.
- Do not go to bed on an empty or too-full stomach.
- Exercise regularly at least six hours before bedtime.
- Do not eat or drink anything containing caffeine within six hours of bedtime.

- Do not drink alcohol within several hours of bedtime.
- Avoid smoking close to bedtime.
- Keep the room where you sleep cool (around 68 degrees).
- Minimize noise with earplugs and sound-absorbing bedroom decorations such as drapes and carpets.

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