Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene is defined as a set of behavioural and environmental recommendations intended to promote healthy sleep. Paying attention to sleep hygiene is one of the most straightforward ways that you can set yourself up for better sleep.

Strong sleep hygiene means having both a bedroom environment and daily routines that promote consistent, uninterrupted sleep. Keeping a stable sleep schedule, making your bedroom comfortable and free of disruptions, following a relaxing pre-bed routine, and building healthy habits during the day, can all contribute to ideal sleep hygiene.

Obtaining healthy sleep is important for both physical and mental health, improving productivity and overall quality of life. Everyone, from children to older adults, can benefit from better sleep, and sleep hygiene can play a key part in achieving that goal.

Requirements for optimal sleep:

- **Cool room** — ideally 18 ° C. Our body temperature falls as we near bedtime, if your room is too warm your metabolic pathways won't acknowledge and prepare your body for sleep.
- **Mattress, bedding and pillows** — an effective mattress promotes relaxed posture and comfortable support that will help you fall and stay asleep. Also, consider using a 'side sleeper' pillow for under your neck when sleeping on your side and use a body pillow to hug and put between your knees to align your back and shoulders at night. Invest in the best bed, mattress and pillow you can afford.
- **Complete darkness** — even the light of an electric alarm clock will stimulate the light sensors in your body inhibiting the natural level of melatonin (a hormone your body creates to help initiate sleep). Get black out curtains or a comfortable eye mask if necessary. Invest in a sunlight alarm. This is designed to combat the sudden, startling awakening of a regular alarm clock which releases cortisol. Instead, the light will gradually turn on and get brighter during the last 30 minutes of sleep. The light stimulates production of hormones that help us to get up and go, while suppressing those that bring on sleep.
- **No eating for a minimum of two hours before sleeping** — your blood sugar levels will be too high, and your body's energies focused on digestion not the repair and resetting that occurs during sleep. It can also encourage feelings of indigestion and reflux waking you up.

- **Minimal electronics before bed** — not only does it stimulate the brain making it hard to switch off but the blue light from electronics closely resembles daylight making it harder to drift off. Use blue light mode on any devices but try to be device free at least 30 minutes before sleep.
- **Daily mindfulness practice** (meditation, breathing, etc) — helps calm the mind.
- **Consistent exercise** — regular exercise can make it easier to sleep at night.
- **No coffee or caffeine after 12 pm** — its stimulating effects last longer than you think, it can take up to 5 hours for the effects of a cup of coffee to start clearing from your body.
- **Consistent bedtime routine** — your body's natural circadian rhythms will start to acknowledge and prepare to a set bedtime.
- **Have a hot bath before bed time** – the drop in body temperature after getting out of the bath can help you fall asleep. Add 500g of magnesium salts to the bath for added muscle relaxation and stay in for 10 – 15 minutes.
- **Daylight exposure** — natural daylight, especially sunlight, is one of the key drivers of circadian rhythms that can encourage quality sleep.
- **Reduce alcohol consumption** — it may make it easier to fall asleep, but it disrupts the length and quality of sleep. You are also more likely to wake in the middle of the night when the effects of alcohol wear off.
- **Pink noise** has shown in some studies to regulate brain waves and may help induce sleep.

Sleep promoting foods?

Certain foods may help or hinder your ability to get a good nights' sleep in that they can impact blood sugar balance, gut health and neurotransmitter and hormone regulation. To discuss your particular challenges, email hello@eatforlife.co.uk.

And if you still can't sleep?

Tossing and turning, willing our body to relax and sleep, can be counter-productive. Sleep experts agree that if you can't get back to sleep within 15 – 20 minutes, it's better to get up and do something that you find relaxing. Then go back to bed when you're tired.

Some people find herbal teas, such as chamomile or valerian helpful, but reading a book and listening to soothing music can also be effective. The key thing is not to get stressed about not sleeping and find out what works best for you.

Book recommendations:

'Why We Sleep' by Matthew Walker, PhD
'The Sleep Solution, why your sleep is broken and how to fix it' by Dr. W. Chris Winter
'Sleep Smarter' by Shawn Stephenson