



10 Keys to Better “Zzzzs”

Sleep deprivation is officially a national epidemic. What can you do to get a better night's rest? SoundSleep™ Solutions suggests the following steps for a relaxing and refreshing slumber:

1. **Relax before bedtime.** Experts recommend that you begin slowing down and preparing for bed one hour before you plan to sleep. If at all possible, find activities that help your mind disengage, such as reading, meditating, a hot shower and journaling. Creating an evening ritual speeds up your body's muscle memory and over time, can help your mind relax faster.
2. **Cut back on caffeine.** Coffee, some teas and most sodas contain enough caffeine to keep many people from sleeping comfortably. Watch out for hidden caffeine in some aspirins and ice cream. If you still can't sleep, try peanut butter and bread (quote 1st for Women) to induce a relaxed state.
3. **Watch the alcohol.** Although alcohol may make you feel sleepy initially, it can cause problems as your body processes it. Nightmares, sweats and headaches are just a few of the side effects of alcohol converting into sugars that disturb your sleep. To help reduce some of these symptoms, try drinking one glass of water for every alcoholic beverage consumed.
4. **Exercise at the right time.** While a regular exercise schedule increases sleep quality by relieving muscle tension and releasing endorphins, exercising just before bedtime can keep you awake. It's best to workout 2-3 hours prior to your bedtime to give your system time to return to normal.
5. **Create a favorable sleeping environment.** Try lavender aromatherapy on your pillows and sheets, play soothing music, reduce noise with earplugs and an eye mask to eliminate glare. Also, adjust your thermostat to 68-72 degrees for an ideal slumber.
6. **Eat right, and sleep tight.** Most experts suggest eating dinner prior to 7 p.m. for the best sleep. If that's not possible, avoid eating a heavy meal or going to bed hungry. These foods encourage a good night's sleep: milk, tuna, halibut, pumpkin, artichokes, almonds, eggs, peaches, walnuts, apricots, oats, asparagus, potatoes and bananas.
7. **Understand jet lag.** Before you cross time zones, try waking up later or earlier to help the body adjust to the time difference. Some studies suggest melatonin to induce a natural sleep – just remember, it takes several days for your body to catch up.

8. **Remember the purpose of your bedroom.** Create a haven out of your bed – use comfortable sheets, pillows and comforters that make you feel pampered. Avoid watching television, eating and emotional discussions in bed. The mind and body associate bedtime activities with being in bed. So don't let a bad habit keep you awake.
9. **Reduce liquids after 8 p.m.** It's a fact – most of us cannot simultaneously go to the bathroom and sleep. For best results, cut back on liquids several hours before you retire.
10. **A little nap goes a long way.** Just a 20-minute power nap during the early part of the day can be a refreshing boost. Sleeping beyond 20 minutes signals a sleep deprivation situation and can also keep you staring at the ceiling that night. Set an alarm clock or practice meditation instead of a nap.

Allison Blankenship is president of Precision Speaking, Inc. which provides process-driven communication tools to accelerate your results, balance your work & life, and deliver dynamic technical presentations. Visit www.PrecisionSpeaking.com for more information on keynotes and training programs.