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# **GUIDE**

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## **Occupational Therapy Guide to Better Sleep**



The Ottawa Hospital | L'Hôpital  
d'Ottawa



***Disclaimer***

*This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified health-care provider. Please consult your health-care provider who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.*

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Occupational Therapists help people to have balance and independence in the activities they do each day. Improving sleep can help a person to manage better. Quality of sleep is directly linked to quality of life. This booklet provides tips to help you get a good night of sleep. Many of these tips will seem like common sense. It is surprising how many of us have forgotten to follow these simple ideas to have a good night of sleep. Try to start using the following tips slowly each day to improve your sleep. If you do make changes, remember that it may take up to 4 weeks to notice a difference.

**What is sleep?** Sleep is a natural way to be when your eyes are closed and you become unconscious. Take the quiz below to see if you have signs of lack of sleep.

**Check below if you suffer from:**

### **Physical Symptoms**

- tired during the day
- lots of stomach aches
- lots of headaches
- more clumsy
- generally don't feel well
- need to take a nap

### **Mental Symptoms**

- nervousness
- sadness / depression
- trouble remembering things
- irritability
- always in a bad mood
- hard to focus

### **Behavioural Symptoms**

- away from work a lot
- not safe when driving
- problems at work
- family problems
- taking more alcohol or drugs
- don't get as much done as you used to

**These can all be signs of lack of sleep.**

# **TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP**

## **Your personal sleep routine**

- Keep a sleep / wake diary. An example is provided at the end of this booklet. Getting to know your current sleep habits is the first step towards making them better. You can use a diary for up to 2 weeks, and maybe again in a few months to see how you are progressing.
- Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.
- Turn down lights during the evening. Your brain registers this like the sun setting and helps to get your body ready for rest and sleep.
- Take a warm bath at bedtime. This can help you feel relaxed and drowsy.
- Leave your worries behind. Reserve a “worry period” before going to bed, and write your thoughts in a notebook so you can get back to them the next morning.
- Find your favourite position. For example, you can explore with different pillows to support you in the most comfortable position.
- Try to relax before bed. For example, use a progressive muscle relaxation, imagine a calm scene, listen to relaxing classical music or nature sounds.
- If you are still not asleep after 20 minutes, get up and relax in another room. Try to do a quiet activity and keep the lights dim. The computer and television are too stimulating.
- Don't drink a lot of liquids before bedtime.
- Have a light snack in the evening including foods high in tryptophan (such as bananas and cheese) to help you feel drowsy.
- Avoid heavy meals too close to bedtime.

## **Your daily occupations**

- Minimize caffeine, tea, soda and chocolate. Caffeine and spicy foods are considered particularly stimulating. Choose warm milk or herbal tea instead.
- Be careful how much alcohol you drink. Alcohol may help you fall asleep more easily, but as the alcohol levels in your blood start to fall, it acts as a stimulant and has a “wake up” effect.
- Television, emails and video games are very stimulating. Turn off these devices 30-45 minutes before you go to bed.
- Avoid napping during the day, or restrict it to a maximum of 45 minutes / day. This way it won't interfere with your night time sleep.
- Expose yourself to natural light throughout the day.
- Consider reducing or quitting smoking. Chronic use of tobacco disrupts sleep.
- Exercise during the day. Regular exercise like walking and swimming can help you sleep better. The practice of Tai Chi has particularly been shown to promote sleep. However, it is best to avoid exercising in the late evening.
- Try relaxation or meditation during the day. Activities such as gentle yoga, deep breathing and listening to soft music for 20-45 minutes can help calm your nervous system.

## **Your sleep environment**

- Keep your bedroom for sleep and intimacy. Make your bedroom a work-free and stress-free zone.
- A cool sleep environment will help you to sleep better. Some sheets can help you to feel cooler.
- If it is noisy, block it out with earplugs or with “white noise”.
- Use dark blinds and / or an eye mask. Keep the lights low when going to the bathroom. Turn your electronic clock away from you and try not to look at it during the night.

## **Answer Yes or No**

I keep the bed for sleep and intimacy.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I have comfortable bed sheets.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
My pyjamas are comfortable.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
My mattress is comfortable.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
My bedroom is kept cool.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
My bedroom is quiet.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
My bedroom is dark.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
My bedroom is free of clutter.	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

**If you answered No to any of these questions, consider making changes to your sleep environment.**

### **Remember:**

*Talk to your Doctor if poor sleep is still a problem. You can share your Sleep Diary to start your discussion with him / her. Your doctor may be able to help you address the issues which are keeping you awake.*

# My Sleep Diary

**Day #1:**      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Wake-up Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Naps: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bedtime: \_\_\_\_\_

## Quality of sleep:

(worst) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (best)

What helped and what was a problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Day #2:**      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Wake-up Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Naps: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bedtime: \_\_\_\_\_

## Quality of sleep:

(worst) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (best)

What helped and what was a problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Day #3:** Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Wake-up Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Naps: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bedtime: \_\_\_\_\_

**Quality of sleep:**

(worst) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (best)

What helped and what was a problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Day #4:** Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Wake-up Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Naps: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bedtime: \_\_\_\_\_

**Quality of sleep:**

(worst) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (best)

What helped and what was a problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Day #5:** Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Wake-up Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Naps: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bedtime: \_\_\_\_\_

**Quality of sleep:**

(worst) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (best)

What helped and what was a problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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