

Top Ten Tips for Refreshing Sleep

1		Before bed, switch your broadband router and any electrical appliances in your bedroom off at the plug, and switch your mobile phone onto airplane mode. This will prevent electrical signals from impacting your sleep patterns.
2		Avoid caffeine after 2pm. Research has shown that consumption of caffeine can have a detrimental effect on both sleep quantity and quality even when consumed six hours before bedtime. And individuals' tolerance can vary, so staying caffeine-free after lunch is a good bet.
3		Cease screen time two hours before bed. Not only can certain content on TV or online stimulate our nervous systems if it is exciting, scary or troubling, but the blue light emitted by phones, tablets and computer screens can disrupt our circadian rhythm (biological process timings such as sleep / wake cycle) and melatonin secretion (the hormone that induces sleep).
4		Get cold! Or at least, a bit colder. The body's core temperature needs to decrease by about 1 degree Celsius in order to initiate sleep, which is why it can be a lot easier to sleep in a room that is a bit colder than we would normally have it.
5		Shhh! When aiming for good quality sleep, the quieter you can make your bedroom, the better. So banish any loudly ticking clocks and encourage snoring spouses to address their 'nasal activity'. Failing that, earplugs or even, dare I suggest separate rooms may be an option when your night's sleep really is important.
6		Darkness is key. You'll have noticed that what we are trying to do here is to reduce all external stimulus in order to create the ideal sleep environment, and this is no different. If any light is seeping in through your eyelids, it will tell your hypothalamus that it's time to wake up, kick-starting other bodily processes like cortisol production. The answer? Black-out curtains or a sleep mask.
7		Know what disagrees with you. Heard the old wives' tale about cheese before bedtime causing nightmares? Well, it turns out there might be something in that. If you eat something in the evening that you have an intolerance to (common suspects are dairy, gluten, food colours and other additives), it can result in insomnia, sleep apnoea, difficulty falling asleep and frequent night-waking.
8		Avoid alcohol. I know, it sucks, but alcohol is a stimulant which keeps your cortisol response switched on. So on those nights where you REALLY need a good night's sleep, best make yourself a nice cup of Horlicks instead. Unless you have an intolerance to it. (see point 7!)
9		Physical activity during the day is great for both your general Health and for getting a good night's sleep, but be wary of doing vigorous physical exercise two hours or less before bedtime, as it can stimulate the part of your nervous system that encourages 'fight or flight', rather than 'rest and digest'.
10		Don't panic! So if you still find that sleep is eluding you, just know this: your body and mind are resting even if you are not fully asleep. And often, when we think we've been awake all night, we've actually had more sleep than we think we have. And finally, breathe! By breathing in for a count of three and out for a count of four, you are engaging your rest and digest state.