hypnowellness
HYPNOTHERAPY AND CBT

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Sleep Hygiene

What is sleep hygiene?

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have normal, quality night-time sleep and full daytime alertness. The incredible research undertaken by sleep-scientists has revealed as a society we are facing an epidemic of sleep-deprivation.* This deprivation can cause many other difficulties both physiological and psychological.

What are some examples of good sleep hygiene?

The most important sleep hygiene measure is to establish and maintain a regular sleep and wake pattern seven days a week. It might also be useful to know that although the number of hours you spend asleep might seem to reduce with age, the number of hours you actually *need* to sleep will be the same as you needed at the age of 25. If you're getting less that this you are probably sleep-deprived.

Further tips for getting a good night's sleep include:

- Avoid napping during the day; it can disturb the normal pattern of sleep and wakefulness.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol after lunchtime. While alcohol is well known to speed the onset of sleep, it disrupts sleep in the second half as the body begins to metabolize the alcohol, causing arousal and possible impairment to breathing.
- Exercise can promote good sleep. Vigorous exercise should be taken in the morning or late afternoon, but not within 2/3 hours before bed. A relaxing exercise, like yoga or T'ai Chi can be done before bed to help initiate a restful night's sleep.
- Food can be disruptive right before sleep; stay away from large meals close to bedtime. Also dietary changes can cause sleep problems, if someone is struggling with a sleep problem, it's not a good time to start experimenting with spicy dishes. And, remember, chocolate usually contains caffeine!
- Beware that certain medications – especially cold remedies – often contain caffeine.
- Ensure adequate exposure to natural light during daytime. This is particularly important for older people who may not venture outside as frequently as children and adults. Daylight exposure – especially in the mornings – helps maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Avoid emotionally upsetting conversations and activities before going to sleep. It's not restful to dwell on, or bring your problems to bed, so learning a technique like self-hypnosis can help reduce that mental activity. It's also worth bearing in mind that "sleeping in" at weekends or days off will never fully compensate for previously lost sleep.
- Associate your bed and your bedroom environment with sleep. It's not a good idea to use your bed to watch TV, or to use a tablet or smartphone as these are stimulating to the brain. Try to ensure your bedroom is cool and as uncluttered as possible. Check that your mattress and pillows are still comfortable and provide the right level of support for you.
- Ensure that your mobile phone or tablet has "Night Light" setting available which switches from blue to red light in the evenings. Avoiding tablet or computer use in the 2 hours before bedtime is also helpful.
- Learn a gentle muscle-relaxation technique. Used with a lulling, hypnotic approach this can be very helpful in the wind-down period before bedtime. Also reading a calming story or listening to soothing music are helpful habits to make.
- Don't force it or be too concerned about the outcome. If you're still awake 20-30 minutes after going to bed consider leaving the bedroom and engaging in a mind-soothing activity to reduce sleep-anxiety. Worrying about not sleeping is one of the major causes of poor sleep. It's been found that the best way of getting to sleep is if you don't care if you sleep or not!
- If you're still struggling, you might consider talking to a therapist with experience of sleep issues. Unfortunately many GPs, while inclined to be sympathetic; often have little to offer beyond prescription drugs which can be severely problematic in the long-term.

*Recommended further reading: "Why We Sleep" by Matthew Walker.