



THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

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TOP 10 WAYS TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

1. Only Sleep and Have Sex in the Bedroom

The bedroom should be used only for sleep and sex. That means no reading in bed and no watching TV in bed. Doing these things (or anything else) confuses your body, making it difficult to fall asleep. Give yourself about 15 minutes to fall asleep. If you haven't fallen asleep by then, get out of bed until you are sleepy. You can do some quiet reading (pick something boring), but avoid TVs and computer screens. Remember, your goal is to train yourself to fall asleep quickly. Reading a stimulating book, watching TV or doing anything else undermines that.

2. Keep a Schedule

Go to bed and wake up at the same time everyday. This will train your body to sleep on a schedule. If you can maintain this schedule for several weeks, you will probably find yourself falling asleep faster and feeling more refreshed. Do not sleep in on weekends or stay up late. Your body adjusts to changes in your sleep schedule at a rate of one hour per day. That means if you wake up at 6:30am on weekdays, but 8:30am on weekends, you need two days to adjust. You won't be sleeping well again until Wednesday each week.

3. Make a Bedtime Ritual

Create a nightly ritual to signal that it is time to sleep. Start the ritual about 30 minutes before you lie down to help release stressful thoughts and be ready to sleep when you lie down. A little quiet reading (not in bed) or a warm bath can be great. Avoid watching TV, since it stimulates the brain.

4. Exercise Daily

Daily exercise will improve your chances of falling asleep quickly and sleeping deeply. Try to exercise early in the day and never within three hours of bedtime. Exercising too late in the day can make it difficult for you to fall asleep. A daily exercise habit will not only improve your sleep hygiene, but it will also improve your overall health.

5. Get Some Sunlight

Sunlight helps regulate your circadian clock and make you feel sleepy at night by stimulating your body to produce melatonin (a hormone that regulates your sleep cycle). You need exposure to bright light everyday. Morning sunlight exposure can be especially helpful. Be sure to open the drapes every morning to let light in.

6. Avoid Caffeine in the Afternoon

Some people are caffeine sensitive and cannot drink any coffee, tea or other caffeinated beverage up to six hours before bedtime. If you are having trouble sleeping, try avoiding all afternoon and evening caffeine.

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7. Make Your Bedroom Dark

The contrast between light during the day and dark at night helps reinforce your body's natural rhythms. By making your bedroom dark at night, you will be able to fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer. Closing drapes and doors can help reduce the light in your bedroom.

8. Avoid Alcohol

That small glass of wine can make it more difficult to stay asleep. After an evening drink, you might fall asleep just fine, but you will likely wake up in the middle of the night. This effect is caused by a rebound in blood sugar and withdrawal from the alcohol after it is metabolized. Try avoiding alcohol before sleep and see if you sleep more soundly. For every drink you have, give your body at least an hour to process it before trying to fall asleep.

9. Don't Smoke

The nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant that will keep you awake, which is just one of the things that smoking does to your body. If you smoke, many resources are available to help you quit. The benefits quitting include better sleep, a longer life, more energy and saving money. Smokers also may wake up early due to nicotine withdrawal.

10. See a Doctor

Finally, if these lifestyle changes don't help, contact your doctor. You may have a sleep disorder or just may need some temporary help getting yourself in good 'sleep shape'.

**If you have any questions or would like to speak to a counsellor
7 days a week from 8am – 8pm, please call the Sleeping Disorders Helpline
0800 SLEEPY (0800 753 379)
or visit the website www.sadag.co.za**

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