

SLEEP HYGIENE

Sleep issues are common and affect 39–47% of perimenopausal women and 35–60% of postmenopausal women.

Complaints regarding sleep include difficulty falling and staying asleep. Sleeping less than seven hours per night has been associated with increased mortality, as well as cardiovascular disease, obesity, mood disorders, and diabetes. Sleep difficulties are more common in postmenopausal women than in premenopausal women and more common in women than in men. Women on MHT show a marked improvement in sleep quality. Some antidepressants have also been shown to cause drowsiness, which may assist with sleep.

Obtaining healthy sleep is important for both physical and mental health, improving productivity and overall quality of life. Strategies to help with sleep may include medication, lifestyle changes, and behaviour modification. Lifestyle modification includes regular schedules, the elimination of caffeine and alcohol, comfortable bedding and temperature, as well as incorporating sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene means having both daily routines and a bedroom environment that promote consistent, uninterrupted sleep. Fixing a sleep schedule ensures that sleep is an essential part of your day.

- Have a fixed wake-up time, regardless of what time you go to bed.
- Prioritise sleep, as tempting as it is to skip sleep to make time for other activities.
- Make adjustments gradually.
- Minimise daytime naps; keep them short and limited to the early afternoon.

Rather than focusing on sleep as your goal, it is sometimes easier to focus on relaxation. Meditation, mindfulness, paced breathing, and other relaxation techniques can help put you in the right mindset for bed. There are many good quality apps available that are specifically aimed at enhancing sleep (Calm, Aura and Headspace). Yoga Nidra is an audible yoga practice that guides the listener into a state of relaxation between waking and sleeping. Yoga Nidra is highly effective for improving the quality of sleep, allowing you to fall asleep faster at night and making staying asleep more effortless.

Positive daytime routines can support your circadian rhythm. Sunlight exposure is one of the key drivers of circadian rhythms that can encourage quality sleep. Regular physical activity can make it easier to fall asleep at night. Nicotine stimulates the body, which can lead to numerous sleeping problems in smokers.

Obvious measures such as omitting stimulants such as coffee in the afternoon and evening, avoiding dining late, and limiting screen time just before bed are all beneficial. Although alcohol can make it easier to fall asleep, the effect wears off, disrupting sleep later in the night. Other natural options to assist with securing a good night's sleep include a long-acting melatonin preparation before bed and lavender products.

Finding the ideal sleep hygiene varies between individuals. The priority is to optimise your environment and habits to facilitate better sleep. Sometimes it may be necessary to test out different adjustments to find out what helps the most.

It is important to ensure that there are no other causes of poor sleep, including sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, or mood disorders. Talking with your health provider may help distinguish possible other causes of sleep disturbance.