

ABC's of Healthy Sleep for College Students

A. Daytime activities

- ❖ **Get up at the same time daily.** A regular wake time will help you fall asleep more easily at night, and helps set your “biological clock”. On weekends, awaken within 1 hour of your weekday wake-up time to stay on schedule.
- ❖ **Avoid naps.** If you have an irresistible urge to sleep during the day, a single nap of 30 minutes or less may be taken in bed. Longer or more numerous naps can disturb sleep the following night.
- ❖ **Avoid caffeine or limit to 3 servings before late afternoon.** If you are not sleeping well, decrease 1-2 servings of caffeine per week, and then stop.
- ❖ **Bright light** during the day (sun light is the best), and **dim light** (including on electronics) 1 hour before bedtime and through the night helps set your “biological clock”.
- ❖ Regular daytime exercise helps to deepen sleep. Exercise too close to bedtime may disturb sleep. Finish exercising at least 3 hours before bedtime.

B. Evening preparations

- **Use the bed only for sleeping.** Avoid reading, using electronic devices (TV, computer, phone), and eating in bed. This will help your brain associate the bed with sleep and being awake out of bed.
- **Avoid alcohol,** especially in the evening. Although alcohol may help some people fall asleep, the sleep through the night becomes fragmented due to alcohol.
- **Avoid using tobacco** in any form, especially at bedtime or if you awaken at night. Tobacco use disturbs sleep.
- **Keep the room temperature moderate and dark.** Excessively warm rooms may disturb sleep. Use curtains or eyeshades to decrease light before and during sleep.
- **Insulate your bedroom against sounds.** Wearing earplugs, rugs, and closing the door may help.
- **Avoid excessive fluid intake in the evening** to minimize the need for nighttime trips to the bathroom.
- Hunger may disturb sleep. A light snack at bedtime may help sleep, avoid greasy or heavy foods.

C. Bedtime and through the night

- ✓ **Go to bed when you are sleepy, not earlier.** Limiting your time in bed helps to consolidate and deepen your sleep. Excessively long times in bed lead to fragmented and shallow sleep.
- ✓ **If you cannot fall asleep, do not lie in bed and “try harder” to fall asleep.** This often makes the problem worse. Instead, get out of bed, go to another room, and do something quietly (such as reading a book) until you become sleepy again. Avoid electronic device use, snacks, or tobacco use, as these can make you more alert. Return to bed only when you become sleepy again. Get up at your regular time in the morning, no matter how much you have slept.
- ✓ **Cover the clock or put it where you cannot see it** from the time you go to bed until your alarm rings.
- ✓ **Do not take your problems to bed.** It is often helpful to spend time earlier in the evening to work on your problems or plan the next day's activities. If you feel your mind is racing or you are having trouble relaxing try **relaxation techniques** at <http://counseling.illinoisstate.edu/self-help/relaxation.shtml>.
- ✓ **Sleep only in bed.** Sleeping in a location other than your bed may make it more difficult to sleep in your bed.