

How to improve your sleep hygiene and decrease insomnia

Things to Avoid

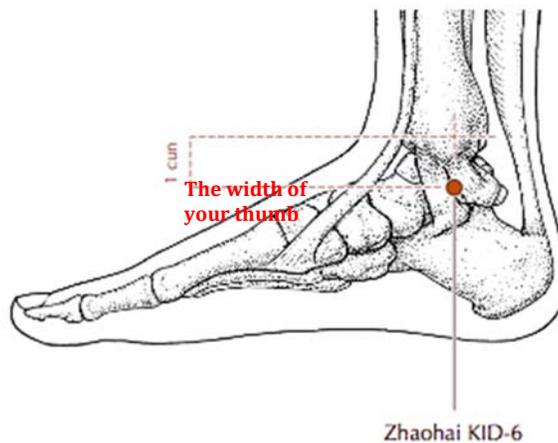
1. **Avoid bright lights** in your eyes before going to sleep. This includes watching television, sitting in front of the computer, or having a lot of lights on in the room for approximately 30 minutes prior to sleep. Instead of having a bright light on while you're trying to read, try to use a bedside lamp or something that is more directed at the book than overall in the room. The reason for this is the pineal gland secretes a hormone called **melatonin** as the sun is going down in response to the growing darkness. If you shine a lot of lights in your eyes prior to going to sleep, this impedes the pineal gland secretion of melatonin and therefore makes it more difficult for you to fall asleep. It may help to use black-out curtains, get rid of night lights, and keep your bedroom cool (60-68 degrees).
2. Try to **avoid caffeine** in the afternoon. Caffeine is a stimulant and it will decrease your ability to go to sleep if consumed after 12 o'clock noon. This includes both caffeinated coffee and caffeinated tea. Please note that decaffeinated coffee still contains between 3-5% caffeine, so even though it is labeled "decaf," decaf coffee is not completely caffeine-free. Watch also for caffeine in medications like Excedrin. **Mint** tea can also be stimulating late in the afternoon or early evening: avoid it before bedtime. (Chose calming **chamomile tea instead.**)
3. Similarly, **nicotine** is a stimulant with effects similar to caffeine. Even if you use smoking as a way to unwind, it is best to avoid it before bedtime or if you wake in the nighttime.
4. High fat foods activate the digestive system strongly and may wake you up in the night to have a bowel movement. Meat is harder to digest and often contains the amino acid tyrosine, which stimulates brain activity: another reason to **avoid heavy meals** before bed.
5. Alcohol may help you fall asleep faster, but it disrupts the circadian rhythm and sleep cycle. It also puts your brain waves into a more wakeful state, so that you are more likely to wake up with little noises in the house. Finally, alcohol can make night sweats and hot flashes worse, particularly in the night. You can dilute alcohol's effects with drinking a glass of water for every glass of alcohol, but of course, trips to the toilet to urinate are then in your future. If you have difficulty sleeping, it is best to **avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.**

Things to Incorporate

1. In the 30 minutes before sleep try to **make a list** of things that you are worried or concerned about and keep that list at the bedside table. After you turn the light out to go to sleep, if you think of other things that are on your mind, things that you have to do over the course of the next day, or things that you're worried about, turn on a small penlight rather than using the overhead light to keep the light as minimal as possible and write down the rest of those concerns. Note to yourself that now you can stop thinking about them as you're going to sleep--you've already written them down and you acknowledged that you have that concern--and it doesn't need to be something that you continue to ruminate on.
2. **Tryptophan-rich foods can help** to relax and calm you. Some good sources are nuts, seeds, bananas, honey and

eggs. Milk is also high in tryptophan, but in general, milk is not the best choice because it generates Dampness.

3. Try to **do something relaxing** for the 30 minutes - 1 hour prior to bedtime. Even if watching television is a good relaxation tool for you, try not to watch a violent movie or something that's very active right before sleep, and ideally the television should be off prior to sleep. Better examples of things to do for relaxation would be meditation, yoga, stretching, or lying on the floor and practicing relaxation techniques such as tightening every muscle in your body and gradually releasing them from your head all the way down to your toes. If you are feeling particularly **anxious**, you can try this exercise <https://biodynamichealth.com/2017/10/16/anxiety-give-it-space/> developed by Samantha Lotti, an acupuncturist and craniosacral therapist.
4. You can also try **activating some acupuncture points** that are good for sleep: rubbing your heels on inner foot near the ankle bone (medial malleolus).



5. A particular type of meditation that I like to recommend is a “**humming meditation.**” It is exactly what it sounds like, by making a hum in the back of the throat with one single note (like a chant of “Om”), but then you concentrate on extending the hum up to the top of your head and all the way down into the soles of your feet with each subsequent breath, allowing it to fill your body one area at a time. If you're still not relaxed after doing this exercise all the way through, then try changing the “color” of the hum: first focusing on the sound alone, try to then to turn it blue, and then green, etc.
6. **Set your body clock** by going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time everyday, even on weekends. This routine will get your brain and body used to being on a healthy snooze-wake schedule. In time, you'll be able to nod off quickly and rest soundly through the night.
7. There are many vitamins and nutrients that can impact sleep. Low **magnesium** levels can contribute to insomnia and low **potassium** levels can lead to easy waking in the night, often due to vivid dreaming. Taking **Vit B12** before bed can impact your melatonin levels (hormone that induces sleep) and keep you awake, while taking **Vit B6** before bed can help to make you feel sleepy: so don't take a B complex or multivitamin before bed if you are already having issues with insomnia. Vit K and D as well as calcium can also impact your sleep.