



Sleep Hygiene

A Practical Guide to Improving Your Sleep

2. Why This Matters (Recovery Context)

Sleep is non-negotiable for physiological restoration, body regulation, and brain healing. Sleeping tablets induce a state of unconsciousness, but do not provide restorative sleep. Protecting your sleep is crucial as it is one of your body's biggest assets for health and recovery.

Poor sleep can negatively impact emotional regulation.

Implementing these strategies can support your overall recovery journey.

3. What's Happening in the Brain and Body

Melatonin Cycle: Bright light exposure in the morning (skygazing) turns off melatonin production. This same mechanism triggers your body to produce melatonin 12 to 14 hours later, preparing you for sleep in the evening.

Circadian Rhythm: This is your body's natural 24-hour cycle of being awake during the day and asleep at night. Every cell and organ system follows this rhythm. Consistent daily routines, especially wake-up times and light exposure, help regulate it.

Body Temperature: Your core body temperature needs to rise in the morning to help you wake up and be active. It must fall in the evening to initiate sleep. Your temperature is typically lowest around 4 AM and highest around 4 PM.

Parasympathetic Nervous System: This is your "rest and digest" system. Activating it is necessary to fall asleep. Relaxation techniques like specific breathing exercises can help engage this system.

Heart Rate Variability (HRV): This is the variation in time between each heartbeat. A high HRV is a safety signal to the brain, indicating a state of calm. It can be increased through techniques like resonance breathing, which helps the brain and body relax for sleep. Alcohol and drugs negatively impact HRV.

4. The Addiction Lens

Stimulants like caffeine, nicotine, and other drugs significantly disrupt sleep architecture. Avoiding them, especially from midday onwards, is critical.

Alcohol, often used as a "nightcap," is detrimental to sleep quality. It disrupts the sleep cycle and should be avoided for restful sleep.

Benzodiazepines are not a long-term solution for sleep issues.

The breathing technique known as physiological sighing can be an effective tool to manage cravings and other states of high activation by quickly calming the nervous system.

5. Core Model or Framework

The most effective, evidence-based intervention for insomnia is **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)**. This session covered its core components:

Sleep Efficiency: Maximising the time you are actually asleep versus the time you spend in bed.

Behavioural Regulation: Establishing rules and routines around the sleep environment and behaviours.

Cognitions (Thought Patterns): Addressing and challenging unhelpful thoughts and



anxieties about sleep.

Sleep Hygiene: A set of daily practices to protect and improve sleep quality.

For CBT-I to be effective, all components should be addressed together. Sleep hygiene alone has limited impact.

6. What This Looks Like in Real Life

Anxious Thoughts: Worrying about not getting enough sleep can create anxiety, which itself prevents sleep. For example, constantly checking the clock ("Only 3 hours until I have to get up!") increases stress.

Unhelpful Associations: Developing a habit of doing other activities in bed (watching TV, working) teaches your brain that the bedroom is a place for wakefulness, making it harder to sleep.

Misguided Night-time Activities: If you get up because you can't sleep, doing a productive or rewarding task (like housework) can train your brain to wake up at that time to get the task done. The activity should be boring with no secondary gain.

7. Practical Strategies for Recovery

CBT-I Principles to Start Now:

Consistent Wake-Up Time: Get up at the same time every single day, including on weekends.

Increase Sleep Efficiency: Do not go to bed until you feel sleepy. If you regularly lie awake for hours, restrict your time in bed to match the hours you are actually sleeping, then gradually extend it as your sleep efficiency improves.

Get Out of Bed: If you cannot fall asleep, get up and do something very boring (e.g., listen to a dull audiobook, read the rules of a complicated game) in low light. Do not engage in stimulating activities.

Bedroom Rules: The bedroom is only for sleep and sex. Remove TVs and other distractions.

Stop Clock-Watching: Remove clocks from your bedroom to reduce anxiety about time.

Daily Sleep Hygiene Routine:

Morning Routine (to set up your night):

Wake Time: Maintain a consistent wake-up time.

Skygazing: Within two hours of waking, look at the sky outside (not directly at the sun) for 20 minutes (less on a very bright day). Do this without sunglasses. This regulates your melatonin cycle.

Exercise: Engage in physical activity to help raise your body temperature.

Cold Shower: Take a cold shower to trigger your body's natural warming response.

Afternoon & Evening Routine (to wind down):

Avoid Stimulants: Stop consuming caffeine (coffee, black tea, energy drinks), nicotine, and sugar from midday. Herbal teas like rooibos and chamomile are fine.

Avoid Naps: Do not nap after 3 PM.

Cool Down: Help your body temperature drop.

- Set your room temperature to be cool, ideally between 15-19°C.

- Have a warm bath or shower 1-2 hours before bed; the subsequent cooling of your body



promotes sleep.

Food: Eat a meal rich in complex carbohydrates 1-4 hours before bed. Avoid alcohol completely.

Wind-Down Time: Dedicate at least 30 minutes to relaxing, non-stimulating activities before bed (e.g., reading a physical book, listening to calm music, meditation).

Light Control: Avoid blue light from screens (phones, TVs, computers) in the evening. Use dim, warm-toned lighting (red/yellow). Your bedroom should be in absolute darkness. Cover all light sources (e.g., from chargers, air conditioners).

Breathing Techniques for Relaxation & Panic:

Resonance Breathing (for falling asleep):

- Lie down comfortably.
- Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4.
- Breathe out slowly for a count of 6.
- Continue this 4-in, 6-out pattern for 5-20 minutes to increase your HRV and signal your brain to relax.

Physiological Sighing (for acute stress/panic/cravings):

- Take a sharp, deep breath in through your nose.
- Without fully exhaling, take another short, sharp breath in to fill your lungs completely.
- Exhale fully and slowly through your mouth.
- Repeat as needed to quickly calm your nervous system.

8. Common Pitfalls

Using sleep hygiene alone: Sleep hygiene practices are most effective when combined with the other principles of CBT-I, especially managing sleep efficiency and unhelpful thought patterns.

Inconsistency: The strategies, particularly the wake-up time, must be practised every day to be effective.

Expecting immediate results: It takes time and consistent practice to retrain your body and brain's sleep patterns.

Using stimulating activities to "relax": Watching TV or scrolling on your phone before bed exposes you to blue light and is mentally stimulating, which interferes with sleep.

9. Key Take-Home Messages

CBT-I is the most proven technique for improving sleep.

Good sleep starts in the morning with a consistent wake-up time and bright light exposure.

Your environment and behaviours throughout the day and evening have a significant impact on your ability to sleep at night.

The bedroom should be a sanctuary for sleep only.

Specific breathing techniques are scientifically validated tools to calm your nervous system and promote sleep.

10. Optional Reflection Questions

What is the one change I can make to my morning routine starting tomorrow?

What activities am I currently doing in my bedroom that are not related to sleep or sex?

How does clock-watching affect my anxiety levels when I can't sleep?



What is one relaxing, screen-free activity I can try during my wind-down time this week?
When do I typically consume caffeine or other stimulants, and how could I adjust that timing?