



Tips for getting a good night's sleep

Trouble sleeping is common after an acquired brain injury. Here are some tips that may help improve your sleep. If these suggestions are not helpful, then talk to your family doctor.

1. **Take less caffeine in your diet.** Caffeine is a stimulant and can keep you awake. Do not take caffeine in the 4 hours before going to bed. Caffeine is found in:
 - coffee
 - colas
 - teas
 - chocolate
 - some over the counter medications
2. **Reduce or stop smoking.** Do not have a cigarette if you are having problems falling asleep. Nicotine is a stimulant and can keep you awake.
3. **Do not drink alcohol.** Drinking alcohol will make you feel drowsy at first. However, as the alcohol wears off, there is a withdrawal effect that can disrupt sleep.

Drinking alcohol on a regular basis can cause long-term problems in sleeping.

4. **Maintain a healthy diet:**

- Follow Canada's Guide to Healthy Eating.
- Eat at regular times.
- Avoid spicy foods that may cause an upset stomach.
- If you are hungry before bed, have a light, healthy snack such as a piece of fruit, toast or a bowl of cereal.

5. **Include activity:**

- Do some activity every day.
- Before you start an activity program, talk with your doctor first about what type of activity you plan on doing and how long you can do it.
- Finish any exercise or activity routine at least 4 hours before going to bed to allow your body to naturally slow down.

6. **Cut out naps.** If you need a rest period, limit it to 30 minutes. Use an alarm clock in case you fall asleep.

7. **Include a routine at bedtime:**

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Try to get up at the same time each morning, no matter how much or how little sleep you get.
- Do a relaxing activity before going to bed such as taking a warm bath, listening to quiet music, read a book, drinking warm milk, meditating, stretching, doing relaxation exercises. The secret is to find something that works for you.
- Do not watch TV programs with action or violence in the hour before you go to bed as they could act as a stimulant.
- Set your alarm and place the clock out of your view. It is hard to relax if you are watching the clock.

8. Create an environment to help you sleep:

- Avoid using your bed for activities other than sleep and sex.
- Have a comfortable bed with a pillow that is right for you and make sure you have proper fitting sheets and blankets.
- Dress or undress for comfort.
- Reduce noise and light as much as possible. Avoid listening to music and watching TV. However, “white noise” such as a fan or air conditioning might help you to fall asleep.
- Make sure your bedroom is a comfortable temperature, and has enough humidity and airflow.

What if I still have trouble getting to sleep when I'm lying in my bed?

Try counting sheep, imagining waves or any other repetitive thought pattern. These can help to prevent other thoughts from entering your mind and keeping you from falling asleep.

If you are still awake after 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing such as reading a book, in another room. Remember to avoid stimulating activities such as smoking and watching TV.

Developed by the health care team
at the Acquired Brain Injury Program