

Importance of Sleep

Sleep disturbances are exceedingly common in headache sufferers. In a study of over 1200 migraine patients, over half reported difficulty getting to sleep and over 60% had problems maintaining sleep.

Many find that a lack of sleep can trigger headache, and sleep is one method often employed to help manage a bad headache. For others, too much sleep can be associated with bringing on a headache.

Some helpful sleep strategies to try:

Have a relaxing pre-bedtime routine 10 to 60 minutes prior to going to bed to try and train your brain that it is time to sleep. Take a hot bath, a warm cup of non-caffeinated tea, read a book, do breathing exercises, listen to nature sounds. Make a list of relaxing things that work for you, and do them every night before bed.

Avoid stimulating or stressful activities right before bed like homework, suspenseful TV shows, competitive games, or things that increase your heart rate.

Keep the room dark, quiet and at a comfortable temperature when it is time to sleep.

- Though when bored and trying to sleep it is very tempting to use your phone. iPad or other screened device – avoid using them. The light from the screen can actually stimulate the brain and make it more difficult to sleep.
- If you live where there is a lot of traffic or ambient noise, consider using a white noise generator, fan or air filter. In one survey by Consumer Reports magazine of people who report problems with sleep, seventy percent said that sound machines helped them to get to and stay asleep.

Use your bed only for sleep. Find another comfortable place to read, watch TV or surf the net. We want your brain to associate your bed *just* with sleep. Go to bed only when you are sleepy and intending to go to sleep

Get out of bed after 20 minutes. Don't lay awake for long periods of time feeling anxious. Find a quiet spot and do something calming: read a book on the couch, listen to relaxing music in your favorite chair. Get back in bed after 20 minutes, when you're feeling sleepy. You can repeat this multiple times throughout the night.

Turn your clock around so you can't look at it. When you see that it's 2am and think, "Oh no, I won't be able to function tomorrow!" it's even more difficult to fall asleep. Watching the clock increases anxiety.

Have "boring" activities ready for times when you can't sleep, so that you don't have to search for something to do. Keep reading materials or music in a place that's comfortable and accessible, like next to your bed.

Set a Sleep Time & Wake Time. You can go to bed later (but not earlier) than sleep time, and wake up earlier (but not later) than wake time. If bedtime is 11pm, you can go to bed at 11:30 but not 10:30. If wake time is 8am you can wake up at 7:30am but not 8:30am. This trains your brain to expect sleep at specific times. *For some people too much sleep can trigger headaches.*

Don't take naps. As tempting as they are, especially when you're tired, restrict sleep to nighttime only. We want your brain to learn that "sleep" happens at a certain time, and "awake" happens at a certain time.

Do not eat a heavy meal or drink large quantities of liquid prior to going to sleep, but do not go to sleep hungry either.

- Try a high protein food or a piece of fruit a couple of hours prior to sleep. They can increase L-tryptophan which helps produce melatonin and serotonin which can help you get to sleep and sleep more deeply

Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Avoid heavy meals or sugary foods before bed. These mess with your body's natural sleep/wake signals.

Exercise helps regulate brain chemistry, and will make your body feel more tired. Try to exercise in the morning and avoid exercising in the evening, especially before bed. Teach your brain that evenings are for slowing down, not revving up.

Get sunlight first thing in the morning. This helps set your biological clock, and reminds your brain that light = wake, dark = sleep.

Give yourself a break! It's hard to change habits, and doesn't happen overnight. It's like building a muscle – it takes time and practice. Be kind to yourself during this process. Try one step at a time and see how it goes!

****After trying these helpful tips listed above and you do not see a difference, you can try melatonin 3 mg 20-30 minutes before bedtime.** You can find it at many supermarkets and pharmacies (Target, Walmart, CVS, Walgreens) and can increase dose to 6 mg if needed. There are immediate release and delayed (extended) release formulations available. If staying asleep is a problem, consider purchasing the delayed formulation. It is available in certain stores, including Sprouts and online (Amazon).