



Restore with Rest & Sleep: Activities and Tips

Adequate rest can impact all aspects of your life! But when things get busy it is often the first thing to be sacrificed. Making the commitment to adequate rest times and sleep can help improve your daily activities and reduce both mental and physical stress.

Quantity is important, but quality is a key aspect of healthy sleep. The more consistent you can make your sleep patterns (going to bed and waking up at the same time) the more improvement you'll see in the quality of sleep you experience. Fitting in time for rest and relaxation prepares your body for sleep, but also gives your brain a break to help it feel refreshed.

Benefits:

- ⇒ Improves mood
- ⇒ Strengthens memory, attention, focus
- ⇒ Supports muscle growth
- ⇒ Boosts mental health and reduces anxiety
- ⇒ Fights off illness and keep Immune system strong
- ⇒ Regulates metabolism and appetite



1. Identify 3 activities you find calming/restful. Do 1 before going to bed.

Engaging in activities that calm your body and mind helps prepare you for restful sleep. Doing a calming activity about 30-60 minutes before bedtime can help reduce the length of time it takes to fall asleep. Regularly engaging in similar activities will help your body to wind down and prepare to rest.

Finding activities you find restful can also help during the day when you have transition times or rough moments. Taking a few minutes to do a restful activity can reset your mind to face the rest of your day more calmly.

Here's some to try:

- Have a cup of tea (decaf or herbal)
- Read poetry
- Review positive affirmations
- Take a warm bath or shower
- Listen to calming music
- Do some gentle stretching or yoga movement
- Meditate or pray
- Eat a light or small snack – one that includes whole grains, lean protein, nuts/seeds or dairy may increase serotonin release to the brain which helps with calming <https://www.sleepassociation.org/about-sleep/top-10-foods-help-sleep/> or <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/5-foods-that-help-you-sleep/>

2. Avoid caffeine and alcohol for 8 hours before bedtime.

Both alcohol and caffeine are stimulants that can interrupt sleep quality. Limiting total intake and avoiding them later in the day can improve both sleep quality and quantity. If these are things you enjoy later in the day try to:

- Gradually reduce the amount consumed
- Dilute your beverage (or have half decaf for coffee)
- Slowly move your final beverage to an earlier time; maybe in 15-minute increments
- Find substitute beverages like herbal or decaf tea (hot or iced), sparkling water, fruit juice or milk



3. Do a mindfulness activity, like meditation, for 10 minutes

Here's some ideas for mindful activities:

- UCLA's free guided meditations: https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/body.cfm?id=22&iirf_redirect=1
- Gentle yoga (Youtube: Cara Bradley: [To Ease Your Body Into Sleep](#))
- Stretch
- Deep breathing: [Deep breathing - 1 minute](#) or [Deep breathing - 3 min](#)
- Listen to calming music (instrumental or classical)
- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#) (about 6 minutes) or [Body Scan](#) (about 9 minutes)
- Go for a mindful walk <https://www.mindful.org/7-ways-to-appreciate-the-natural-world/>



More ideas at: <https://www.mindful.org/>

4. Make 1 change to your bedroom or sleeping space to improve the sleep environment.



Your sleep environment can impact your sleep quality. Think about changes that are possible in your sleeping space that may make it more calming. A few areas to think about are:

- Visual - This may be simple things like getting rid of some of the clutter, turning off electronics earlier, or making your bed each day. Decorating with cool colors or calming artwork can also help.
- Light – If you have too much light interference maybe some better window coverings or wearing a sleep mask may help.
- Noise – Quieter is better but can be hard on a college campus! Try noise blocking window coverings, soft earplugs, playing quiet calming music or a “white noise” machine if needed.
- Temperature - around 65 degrees is considered the ideal sleep temperature. Running a fan or opening window slightly can help much of the year.

Many more detailed ideas on these websites:

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/preparing-your-bedroom-for-a-great-nights-sleep>

<https://www.alaskasleep.com/blog/tips-creating-ideal-sleep-environment>

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/bedroom-environment/how-to-design-the-ideal-bedroom-for-sleep>

5. Establish a pre-sleep routine and start doing it.

Bedtime routines help your brain separate the day from the night, clear your mind and body of the day's stresses, and relax into sleep. Find ideas for preparing for sleep at:

- Refresh program <https://studentwellness.uiowa.edu/programs/refresh/>
- <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene/bedtime-routine-for-adults>

6. Download a sleep or meditation app or podcast and listen to it or use the app at least once.

- Refresh program <https://studentwellness.uiowa.edu/programs/refresh/>
- Podcast: *The Millennials Guide to Mindfulness*. You might find some of the episodes interesting. <https://catchingzs.libsyn.com/>
- *Dharma Seed* has hundreds of talks on meditation, all for free. <https://dharmaseed.org/>
- Kristin Neff's free self-compassion meditations: <https://selfcompassion.org/category/exercises/#guided-meditations>
- **Apps:** Calm, Headspace, Mindfulness Daily (free)

Other Resources:

Student Wellness Koru Mindfulness for Students workshops:

<https://studentwellness.uiowa.edu/programs/mindfulness/> - 4 week workshops offered each semester which are oriented to incorporating mindfulness into students' lives

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: <https://uihc.org/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction>

Mindfulness Matters hosted by University Counseling Services: <https://counseling.uiowa.edu/students/university-counseling-service-is-open/virtual-counseling-services->

Go Ask Alice! <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/search/node/sleep>

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

Please note, some challenges cannot be resolved through simple well-being activities. You can't self-care yourself through sleep disorders such as sleep apnea or narcolepsy, mental health problems like anxiety or depression, or the impact of external factors such as trauma or systemic oppression. If you are struggling with significant challenges the University of Iowa has professional resources to support you. Start here to find resources:

<https://mentalhealth.uiowa.edu/>

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