



Guide to Better Sleep for Adults with ADHD

Introduction

Sleep is essential for everyone, but it can be particularly challenging for individuals with ADHD. Many adults with ADHD struggle with sleep problems, which can exacerbate symptoms and affect overall well-being. This guide provides evidence-based strategies and tips for improving sleep hygiene specifically for those with ADHD.

Understanding the Sleep Challenges in ADHD

People with ADHD often experience:

- Difficulty falling asleep: Racing thoughts and internal hyperactivity can delay sleep onset.
- Frequent awakenings: Disrupted sleep due to an overactive mind.
- Restless sleep: Poor sleep quality affecting next-day functioning.
- Delayed sleep phase: Tendency to go to bed and wake up later.

Sleep Hygiene Tips

Good sleep hygiene involves habits and practices that promote consistent, restorative sleep. Here are tailored strategies for individuals with ADHD:

1. Establish a Routine

- Consistent Sleep Schedule: Go to bed and wake up in the same 'sleep window' and 'wake window' every day, even on weekends. This helps regulate your body's internal clock.
- Wind-Down Period: Set aside at least 30-60 minutes before bed for calming activities. This can include reading, listening to soothing music, or practising relaxation techniques.

2. Create a Sleep-Inducing Environment

- Dark and Cool Room: Keep your bedroom dark and cool. Use blackout curtains and consider a fan or white noise machine to mask background noise.
- Comfortable Bedding: Invest in a good mattress and pillows that support your sleeping style.
- No screens: Ideally, the room you sleep in should be screen-free. If you must have your phone, keep it away from your bed.

3. Limit Stimulants and Electronics

- **Reduce Caffeine and Nicotine:** Avoid caffeine and nicotine, especially in the afternoon and evening, as they can interfere with falling asleep.
- **Limit Screen Time:** Blue light from screens can hinder melatonin production. Turn off electronic devices at least 60 minutes before bedtime.

4. Last Few Hours Before Bed

- **Avoid Heavy Meals:** Steer clear of large meals close to bedtime. Opt for a light snack if you're hungry.
- **Limit Alcohol:** While alcohol may initially make you feel drowsy, it can disrupt sleep later in the night.
- **Avoid Vigorous Exercise:** Exercising too close to bedtime can make it more difficult to sleep, but exercise earlier in the day can be beneficial.

Evidence-Based Sleep Improvement Strategies

1. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)

- **What It Is:** CBT-I is a structured program that helps address thoughts and behaviours that prevent restful sleep.
- **Benefits:** Research shows CBT-I is effective in reducing insomnia symptoms and improving sleep quality in individuals with ADHD.

2. Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

- **Deep Breathing and Meditation:** Practicing mindfulness and meditation before bed can calm the mind and prepare it for sleep.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Gradually tensing and relaxing muscle groups can ease physical tension and stress.

3. Exercise

- **Regular Physical Activity:** Engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days. Remember to finish exercising at least a few hours before bedtime to avoid overstimulation.

4. Melatonin Supplements

- **Consideration:** Melatonin is a hormone that regulates sleep-wake cycles. Some studies suggest it can help those with ADHD fall asleep faster, with some reporting that a dose 4-6 hours before bed followed by a dose before bed may



work more effectively. Melatonin is now more difficult to obtain on the NGS, so consult your GP about its use.

5. Limit Naps

- Nap Smartly: If you need to nap, keep it short (20-30 minutes) and avoid late-afternoon naps that can interfere with nighttime sleep.

6. Weighted Blankets

- What We Know: There is some evidence that using a weighted blanket can help children with ADHD sleep better.

Additional Tips for Managing ADHD and Sleep

- Medication Timing
 - Discuss with Your Doctor: If you're taking ADHD medication, consult your healthcare provider about the timing, as stimulant medications may interfere with sleep. If you use methylphenidate, in some cases, it can help with sleep if the dose and time of taking medication is optimised. **ALWAYS** consult with your doctor before making any decisions about medication.
- Journaling
 - Nightly Reflection: Writing down thoughts, concerns, or a to-do list for the next day can help clear your mind and reduce anxiety before bed.
- Sleep Apps and Trackers
 - Use Technology Wisely: There are apps designed to promote better sleep through guided meditations, sleep stories, and sleep tracking. Choose those that encourage healthy sleep habits.

Conclusion

Improving sleep quality can significantly impact the management of ADHD symptoms and overall health. By implementing these sleep hygiene tips and evidence-based strategies, individuals with ADHD can work towards more restful and restorative sleep. Remember, it's important to be patient and consistent with these practices, as it may take time to see significant improvements. If sleep issues persist, consider consulting a healthcare professional for further evaluation and tailored interventions.

Resources

[The Sleep Charity.](#)