

## Creating a Restful Environment

Many times environmental distractions can make sleeping difficult. Once you identify potential distractions, you can develop a plan to minimize the impact of the distractions on your sleep.

### TEAM UP:

*Determine if any of the problems and solutions described below apply to you.*

- **Problem:** “My room is really noisy when I try to sleep.”

**Solution:** Use a fan or set a radio to an all static station. Such background noise may help block out other sources of noise.

- **Problem:** “The sun comes in early in the morning and wakes me up.”

**Solution:** Most stores sell blackout curtains specifically designed to darken a room.

- **Problem:** “My snoring (or my partner’s snoring) makes it hard to fall asleep and wakes me up several times each night.”

**Solution:** More than just an annoying problem, snoring may be related to a breathing problem called apnea. You or your partner should discuss the snoring problem with a medical provider.

## Resources

There is a lot of information available on sleep problems, but where can you find the most up to date information?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Sleep and Sleep Disorders  
<http://www.cdc.gov/sleep/>
- American Academy of Sleep Medicine - Sleep Education  
<http://www.sleepeducation.com/>
- Sleepdex - Good Sleep for Good Health  
<http://www.sleepdex.org/>

## Do You Need More Help?

If you feel your sleep problems have reached the point where you need more help, please contact your VA provider to discuss additional treatment options. In the case of a lifethreatening emergency, call 911 or go to the emergency room of your local hospital or the VA.



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# Healthy Sleeping



Part of the  
**Team Up to Facilitate  
Functioning (TUFF)** series by the  
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center  
Polytrauma Team





## What Is Sleep?

Sleep may seem simple, but it is actually a very complex process. Sleep is necessary to replenish your body and mind at the end of each day. Problems with sleep can be caused by mental health conditions, medical issues, medications, stress, and distractions within the environment. Poor sleep can change the way you act, think, and feel.

### TEAM UP:

#### What type(s) of sleep problems do you have?

- Problems falling asleep
- Problems staying asleep
- Problems waking up too early

## Sleep Hygiene

Regardless of the underlying cause of sleep problems, there are several behavior changes you can make to help you get the best possible night's rest. These behavior changes are generally called "sleep hygiene." Following a good sleep hygiene routine trains your body to slowly wind down at the end of each day and to fall asleep quickly when the time comes.

## Do's and Don'ts of Sleep

Getting a good night's rest requires attention to what you do before you sleep.

### TEAM UP:

*Read the following Sleep Hygiene Do's and Don'ts and mark behavior changes that are most important for you.*

### DO:

- Go to bed and get up at approximately the same time every day, including weekends and days off.
- Exercise every day in the morning or afternoon.
- Avoid stimulating activities before going to bed (e.g., scary movies, video games).
- Spend a few minutes in the sunlight each morning.

### DON'T:

- Exercise just before going to bed.
- Stay in bed for longer than 20 minutes if you can't sleep. Instead, get up, leave the bedroom, and do something relaxing like listening to gentle music or reading until you feel tired.
- Watch TV, eat, or read in bed (you should use the bed for sleep only).
- Take long naps during the day.
- Drink alcohol or caffeine before going to sleep.

## Preparing for Sleep with Relaxation

Getting your body and mind to relax is critical to falling and staying asleep. Developing simple skills such as deep breathing and relaxation techniques can help you prepare for sleep.

Here are some things to try when you are attempting to fall asleep:

**1.** Breathe deeply from your stomach (not your chest). Slowly take at least 10 of these breaths – you will feel your body relaxing more with each breath.

### TEAM UP:

*Practice taking a few deep breaths now.*

**2.** While breathing deeply, slowly repeat a calming word or phrase to help focus your mind on being calm (e.g., "let it go" or "relax").

**3.** Try visualizing a relaxing scene either from real life or your imagination. Incorporate as many senses as possible to help make the scene as vivid as you can in your mind (e.g., smell of salt air, softness of the earth beneath your toes, warmth of the sun on your skin).



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