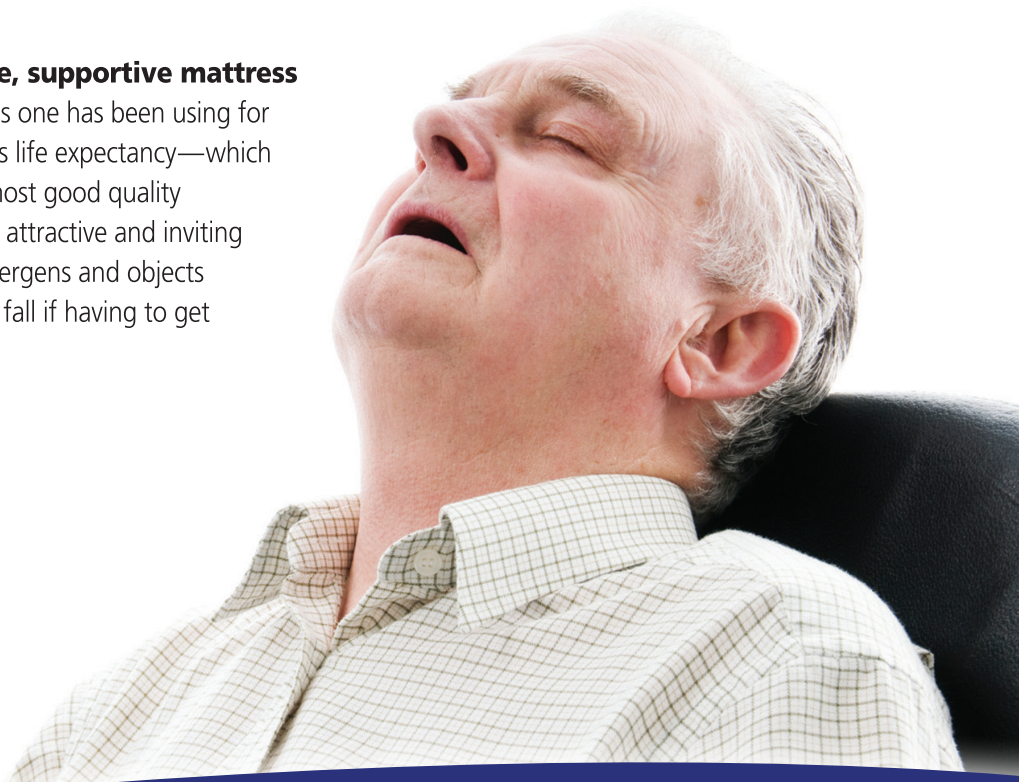


Healthy Sleep Tips

Whether you are a caregiver or trying to encourage a loved one to get more sleep, there are several ways to set the stage for a good night's rest.

- **Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule, including weekends.** The sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in the brain and the body's need to balance both sleep time and wake time. A regular waking time in the morning strengthens the circadian function and can help with sleep onset at night.
- **Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine** such as soaking in a hot bath or hot tub and then reading a book or listening to soothing music. A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime conducted away from bright lights helps separate sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress, or anxiety which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep, or remain asleep. Avoid arousing activities before bedtime like working, paying bills, engaging in competitive games, or family problem-solving.
- **Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.** Check the room for noise or other distractions, including a bed partner's sleep disruptions such as snoring, light, and a dry or hot environment. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise," humidifiers, fans, and other devices.
- **Sleep on a comfortable, supportive mattress and pillows.** The mattress one has been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy—which is about 9 or 10 years for most good quality mattresses. Make the room attractive and inviting for sleep but also free of allergens and objects that might cause a slip or a fall if having to get up during the night.



- **Use the bedroom only for sleep.** It is best to take work materials, computers, and televisions out of the sleeping environment. If a particular activity or item is associated with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from the bedtime routine. For example, if looking at a bedroom clock causes anxiety about how much time remains before getting up, move the clock out of sight.
- **Finish eating at least 2–3 hours before bed.** Eating or drinking too much may cause discomfort when settling down for bed. It is best to avoid a heavy meal too close to bedtime. Also, spicy foods may cause heartburn, which leads to difficulty falling asleep and discomfort during the night. Try to restrict fluids close to bedtime to prevent nighttime awakenings to go to the bathroom, though some people find milk or herbal, non-caffeinated teas to be soothing and a helpful part of a bedtime routine.
- **Exercise regularly—just do it a few hours before bedtime.** In general, exercising regularly makes it easier to fall asleep and contributes to sounder sleep. However, exercising sporadically or right before going to bed will make falling asleep more difficult. In addition to making us more alert, our body temperature rises during exercise, and takes as much as six hours to begin to drop. A cooler body temperature is associated with sleep onset. Finish exercise at least three hours before bedtime.
- **Avoid caffeine close to bedtime.** Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it can produce an alerting effect. Caffeine products, such as coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate, remain in the body on average from three to five hours, but they can affect some people up to 12 hours later. Even if caffeine effects are not generally noticeable, they can still disrupt and change the quality of sleep. Avoid caffeine within 6–8 hours of going to bed.
- **Avoid nicotine.** Because nicotine is a stimulant, using nicotine can lead to poor sleep. When smokers go to sleep, they experience withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, which also cause sleep problems. Difficulty sleeping is just one more reason to quit smoking. And never smoke in bed or when sleepy!
- **Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.** Although many people think of alcohol as a sedative, it actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings. Consuming alcohol leads to a night of less restful sleep.

Contact **Virginia Home Care Partners** to find out more information on how to get a healthy, restful night's sleep and to learn about respite care and how we can help a family caregiver avoid the complications of sleep deprivation.

Source: National Sleep Foundation