

WIND DOWN FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

15 Try tryptophan-rich proteins. This amino acid is found in milk, yogurt, cheese and turkey. It reportedly relaxes the central nervous system. *This recommendation is based on folklore rather than scientific proof.* Try it anyway to see if it helps you to fall and stay asleep.

16 Don't go to bed hungry. Eat a small pre-bed snack (such as whole-wheat bread or crackers with sliced turkey) if you had an early dinner. Hunger can keep you awake and may cause you to raid the refrigerator later.

17 Avoid caffeine after 3:00 p.m. Experiment to find your personal best cut-off time for caffeinated coffee, tea, cola, other soft drinks and chocolate. Caffeine's stimulating effect on the central nervous system can last up to, and even exceed, ten hours.

18 Screen your medications. Check them for caffeine. Have your doctor prescribe non-stimulating drugs if possible. Buy non-caffeinated "PM" versions of headache, weight-control, cold, allergy and similar over-the-counter products.

19 Beware of alcoholic "nightcaps." Drink wines and spirits with dinner in moderation. *As sedatives they promote sleep but minimize deep sleep,* during which most of the body's repairs take place. They may cause morning hangovers.

20 Cut fluids early. Make 8:00 p.m. the cut-off time for all liquids (even water!) to reduce nighttime bathroom trips. *Steer clear of diuretic drinks such as alcohol, coffee, tea and soda.* They remove water from the body by stimulating urination, thus making you thirsty.

21 Become an ex-smoker. Nicotine, a stimulant, makes the heart race and elevates blood pressure. Cravings may interrupt your sleep to push you to replenish your brain's nicotine supply.

22 Keep calm. Avoid pre-bedtime stimulation. *Stay away from TV programs that are agitating, upsetting or get the adrenalin going.* That means newscasts, adventure shows, horror movies, even commercials. Also skip video games, the Internet, job-related work, emotional discussions—whatever may keep your mind racing.

23 Refuse to worry. Dry up stress-hormone secretion by writing down your worries so you won't take them to bed with you. *Promise to "worry about them tomorrow,"* or offer them to God for resolution. They are likely to vanish overnight, or your subconscious mind will come up with solutions. Leftover worries can be dealt with more easily after a good night's sleep.

24 Unwind with quiet "me" time. Meditate, do relaxation and breathing exercises, listen to soft music or CDs with soothing messages or sounds such as ocean waves or chirping insects at dusk. Develop a bedtime ritual as a cue for your mind to prepare to sleep.

25 Take a hot bath or shower. Do so 10 to 90 minutes before bed. Experiment to discover your best time. Your temperature will drop, making it easier for you to fall asleep.

26 Switch to twilight settings. Dim the lights to stimulate sleep-inducing melatonin. Avoid exposure to the light emitted from large TV screens, and use a reading lamp at the lowest suitable setting.

27 Invite romance. Embrace. Use mutual massage. Cuddle, kiss, make up, make love. Physical and emotional communication with a significant other is one of nature's great sleep aids.