

Amherst College

Strategic Learning Center

6 Ways to Sleep Smarter

Sleep is essential to your overall physical and mental health. Here are 6 ways that you can improve your sleep right now.

1. Go to bed at the same time, every night

- Your body isn't built to go to sleep at different times.
- Try to wind down and go to bed at the same time each night.

2. Get a full night's sleep

- The brain cycles through four different sleep phases—including REM as the most restorative. You need a full night's sleep to reap the benefits of REM phases.
- You're probably sleep deprived if the minute your head hits the pillow, or when you find yourself a comfy chair throughout the day, you're immediately asleep.
- Try to get between 7-10 hours of sleep a night

3. Avoid alcohol and other drugs before bed

- Alcohol in particular is linked to the production of adenosine, a chemical that helps induce sleepiness, but this chemical wears off part way through the night, often causing you to wake up before you've gotten a full night's rest and interrupting your much-needed REM sleep.
- Stimulant drugs, including caffeine, will prevent you from falling asleep or having deep sleep, especially when taken later.
- Try to fall asleep without substances that inhibit sleep.

4. Stay away from screens before bed

- The blue light emitted by our screens tricks our brain into thinking it's daytime, halting the release of melatonin, a chemical which helps us sleep more soundly.
- Try a relaxing non-screen activity before bed, like reading, meditating, or listening to calming music.
- If something unexpected comes up, and you must work on a screen, turn on a Night Shift feature on your device, which will make your display appear warmer.

5. Try not to “snooze”

- In the morning, as your sleep comes to an end, you're likely nearing the end of your last REM cycle. When you “snooze,” your brain falls back into that cycle, only to be jarred awake again a few minutes later, leading to heightened grogginess.
- Try putting your phone on the other side of the room so you have to physically get up to turn it off, or turning on a bright light after getting up (being mindful of your roommate if you have one).

6. Use your bed for sleep and sleep alone

- Our brain will learn to associate whatever activity we do with the area we do it.
- Try to only sleep in bed, and not use it for other activities.
- If you're having a hard time falling asleep (say, over 30 minutes), try getting up and doing something relaxing until you feel tired.