

Refresh

The science of sleep for optimal performance and well being



Unit 4: Chill-out Before Bedtime

Taking some time to unwind before bedtime can definitely help improve the quality of your sleep. Things to avoid during this time include anything that amps you up, even hardcore studying. Avoid the gym, the *Saw* sequel, the dorm-wide Frisbee golf tournament, and the lovers' quarrel if you're planning to sleep in the next hour.

Instead, try chilling with friends (but avoid discussing politics, sports, or anything else that gets your mind going faster), reading a good book, listening to music (maybe save the techno for another time), writing in your journal, or even trying some of the relaxation exercises described below.

Relaxation exercises:

Deep Breathing:

Sit, or lay down in a comfortable position.

1. Place one hand over your abdomen and one hand over your chest.
2. As you breathe, pay attention to which hand moves more.
3. Take a slow deep breath focusing, as you inhale, on breathing with your abdomen so that the hand on your abdomen moves first. As you continue to inhale, allow your chest to expand as well.
4. Gently exhale slowly and completely.

Take a few more deep breaths, noticing the deep feeling of relaxation. You may notice the greatest sense of relaxation during exhalation.

5. Placing one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest is to help you learn to expand your abdomen as you breathe deeply. After learning this, you can place your hands in any position most comfortable for you, such as in your lap or at your sides.

Meditative breathing, adding a focus:

1. Begin deep breathing.
2. With each inhalation, repeat a soothing word in your mind (e.g., "peace").
3. With each exhalation, repeat a soothing word in your mind (e.g., "love").
4. At the end of each exhalation, count (in your mind) the number of deep meditative breaths you've completed.
5. Continue until you reach 20.

Whenever you notice your mind has wandered, gently bring your attention back to your breathing and the soothing words. The more often your mind wanders, the more opportunities you have to practice gently bringing your attention back to your breathing and the soothing words. If you are practicing shortly before bedtime, you might actually fall asleep before you get to 20 deep breaths. If that happens, crawl into bed and allow yourself to fall asleep.

To learn another, somewhat more involved relaxation technique, continue reading:

Progressive muscle relaxation:

Sit or lay in a comfortable position.

Take a few deep breaths, noting the feeling of relaxation.

Gently tighten the muscles in your lower legs, allowing the tension to build for a few seconds.

Hold the tension in your lower legs for a few more seconds; then release it, allowing all of the tension to flow away from your lower legs and out with a gentle slow exhalation.

Notice the feeling of deep relaxation in your lower legs.

Gently tighten the muscles in your thighs and buttocks, allowing the tension to build for a few seconds.

Hold the tension for a few more seconds; then release it, allowing all of the tension to flow from your thighs and buttocks and out with a gentle slow exhalation.

Notice the feeling of deep relaxation throughout your legs and buttocks.

Gently tighten the muscles in your abdomen, allowing the tension to build for a few seconds.

Hold the tension for a few more seconds; then release it, allowing all of the tension to flow from your abdomen and out with a gentle slow exhalation.

Notice the feeling of deep relaxation in your abdomen.

Gently close your fists and tighten the muscles in your arms and chest, allowing the tension to build for a few seconds.

Hold the tension for a few more seconds; then release it, allowing all of the tension to flow from your arms and chest and out with a gentle slow exhalation.

Notice the feeling of deep relaxation in your chest and arms.

Notice the feeling of relaxation spreading throughout your body.

Gently tighten the muscles in your face. Close your eye lids, press your lips together, and wrinkle your forehead, allowing the tension to build for a few seconds.

Hold the tension in your face and forehead for a few more seconds; then release it, allowing all of the tension to flow out with a gentle slow exhalation.

Notice the feeling of deep relaxation in your face and forehead.

Notice the deepening feeling of relaxation throughout your body as you take a few more gentle deep breaths, allowing any remaining tension anywhere in your body to flow out with each exhalation.

Notes on variation of this technique:

You can change the order of the above, or divide body areas into smaller muscle groups.

For example you can focus on the right and left arms separately, or the thigh muscles and buttocks separately. You can experiment and discover what works best for you to release tension and relax.

Practice Suggestions:

1. Continue following the sleep scheduling you began last week.
2. Practice setting aside some time to unwind before bedtime, doing things that are both enjoyable and relaxing for you.

