



# SELF-HELP EXERCISE: GET BETTER SLEEP

## INTRODUCTION

It's common to have trouble sleeping after military service and beyond. If your sleeping problem is severe (i.e., you've not had good sleep for more than a month straight), please tell your doctor. If you want to improve a mild to moderate sleep problem, the good news is you can. Just follow the simple tips in this exercise.

### Why do I have a hard time sleeping?

Your mind and body may not have figured out that you are no longer in theater or training and that it doesn't need to act as if you are under constant threat of danger.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO



### Exercise

If possible, exercise during the day, preferably in the late afternoon before dinner. Cardio exercise (20 minutes or more) is best, but even 45 minutes to an hour of brisk walking will work. Exercise is the best promoter of sleep.



### Be consistent

Go to bed and get up at roughly the same time every day, even if you're tired in the morning. Don't vary your time of going to bed or getting up, even on weekends. "Catching up" on the weekends only confuses your body's wake-sleep cycle.



### Avoid napping

If you have severe difficulty falling or staying asleep at night, avoid naps during the day. We know it's tempting, but you need to be tired at bedtime.



### Reduce caffeine and nicotine

Reduce caffeine and nicotine consumption as much as possible. If you drink coffee, drink it only in the morning. Avoid high-caffeine energy drinks, because caffeine is a stimulant and you shouldn't have it within four to six hours of going to bed. Nicotine is also a stimulant, so avoid smoking for at least an hour before bedtime.



### Write

If you tend to lie in bed and worry, place a pad and pencil next to your bed, and write down your worrisome thoughts with the mental promise that you will "worry" about them the next day. You may find your problems seem more manageable after a night's rest and in the light of day.



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