

# HEALTHY SLEEP

## Following Concussion/mTBI

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center



### HEALTHY SLEEP PRACTICES

Getting restful sleep is one of the most important things you can do to help you recover from your concussion, and this often takes preparation during the day. Improve your sleep regimen with these healthy sleep tips:

- Aim for a minimum of seven hours of sleep on a regular basis
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine and energy drinks within six hours of your usual bedtime
- Exercise regularly, preferably finishing two hours before bedtime
- Avoid alcohol within two hours of your bedtime
- Promote a sleep friendly environment; minimize noise and light and maintain a cool but comfortable room temperature
- Avoid use of smartphones or reading devices that give off light for two or more hours before bedtime. Such light can block the brain signals that allow sleep to occur. You can use the night setting/blue light filter on your smartphone when available
- Get exposure to natural light every morning
- Try to avoid napping within seven hours of your usual bedtime

### INSOMNIA

If you are having difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, you can try implementing these therapies:

**1. Stimulus Control:** Some people with insomnia have learned to associate their bedroom with staying awake rather than sleeping. Stimulus control can strengthen your association of your sleep environment with sleeping.

- Use your bedroom for sleep and intimacy only
- Set a fixed wake time; get up at the same time every morning, regardless of how long you slept, even on weekends
- Avoid going to bed when experiencing strong emotions, such as anxiety, anger, or fear
- Go to bed only when tired and sleepy
- If you are unable to fall asleep within what you think has been 15-20 minutes:
  - Get up and go to another room to read or find another relaxing activity to do until you feel sleepy again (avoid electronics, bright light and checking time)
  - When you start to feel sleepy, you can return to bed
  - If you cannot fall asleep in another 20 minutes, repeat the process

# INSOMNIA

## 2. Relaxation

- Progressive muscle relaxation can help you relieve muscle tension. The idea is to progressively relax your muscles from your head down to your feet. Try to focus on tightening and then releasing one muscle group at a time. You can begin with the muscles in your face; squeeze your muscles for one to two seconds and then relax. Repeat several times before proceeding to the next muscle group.
- Deep breathing can help you reduce stress. First breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose while keeping your shoulders relaxed. Your abdomen should expand and your chest should rise very little. Then, breathe out through your mouth with your lips pursed slightly while keeping your jaw relaxed. Repeat for several minutes.

- 3. Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the practice of purposefully paying attention to the present moment. It may help you reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Try *Mindfulness Coach* app below to practice.

## APPS AND WEB TOOLS

The DoD and VA provide several free resources to help you improve your sleep.

Scan the code below  
to access VA apps



Scan the code below  
to access the Military  
Health System apps



Scan the code below  
to access the Path to  
Better Sleep app



1. **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-i) Coach:** Includes a sleep diary to help you pinpoint behaviors that are contributing to your sleep problems. Also provides interactive exercises to adopt positive sleep habits and guide you through progressive muscle relaxation.
2. **Mindfulness Coach:** Provides nine different guided mindfulness exercises and strategies for overcoming challenges to mindfulness practice.
3. **Breathe2Relax:** Provides instruction on diaphragmatic “belly” breathing, which helps lower stress and reduce anxiety. Graphics, animation, narration, and videos lead you through several breathing exercises.
4. **DreamEZ:** Helps you rewrite nightmares into less disturbing dreams for a better night’s sleep using the principles of imagery rehearsal therapy (IRT).
5. **Tactical Breather:** Provides guided breathing instruction to gain control over heart rate, emotions and concentration during stressful situations.
6. **Path to Better Sleep:** A free, anonymous course that delivers the core components of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia. The course takes advantage of natural sleep rhythms to improve sleep. It includes a sleep diary, personalized sleep scheduling, and relaxation exercises to better “set the stage” for sleep.

## FOR ONLINE INFORMATION:

To learn about harmful sleep habits and hear personal stories, visit [health.mil/sleep](https://health.mil/sleep).



**Remember to contact your health care provider about any concerns you may have about your sleep.**