COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY FOR INSOMNIA (CBT-I)

Sleep Hygiene

The everyday habits that set the stage for good sleep.

> **Start small:** you don't need to do all of these at once. Pick two or three habits to begin with, practise them consistently, and add more as they become routine.

1 Keep a steady daily rhythm

- **Keep a consistent sleep schedule.** A set wake-up time is the anchor — stay within 30–45 minutes of it every day, even on weekends. Have a regular bedtime too, but if you are up later than usual, still get up at the same time.
- **Don't sleep later on weekends.** Sleeping in an extra 2–3 hours on weekends leads to the equivalent of jet lag every Monday.
- **Get up briskly, and get light.** Don't use the snooze button. Get natural light within an hour of waking — if daylight isn't available, use a bright light therapy (SAD) lamp.
- **Be careful with naps.** Avoid them if you can. If you do nap, keep it to 20–30 minutes at most, and no later than mid-afternoon.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise deepens sleep — but finish vigorous exercise at least **2 hours** before bedtime. Gentle stretching or an easy walk in the evening is fine.

2 Watch what you consume

- **Cut down stimulants.** Caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks, chocolate), nicotine, and decongestants all keep the nervous system activated, and caffeine can throw your body clock out of sync with your sleep drive. If you use caffeine, keep it to the equivalent of 1–2 cups of coffee maximum, and only before lunch.
- **Limit alcohol.** Don't drink within 3 hours of bedtime. Alcohol may help you fall asleep, but it fragments sleep later in the night. Don't use THC (cannabis) as a sleep aid. Both alcohol and marijuana (THC) reduce the amount of REM sleep.
- **Time your evening eating.** Go to bed neither too hungry nor too full. Finish large meals 2–3 hours before bed; a small evening snack that is high in carbohydrate but easy to digest sometimes helps.

3 Wind down in the evening

- **Have a wind-down routine.** It isn't realistic to be busy non-stop and then suddenly fall asleep. A routine of 20–60 minutes of calming activities — stretching, reading, quiet hobbies, relaxation — lets your brain gently slow down, and becomes a cue for sleep.
- **Dim the lights.** Lower the ambient light in the last hour before bed; dim light cues your body to release melatonin.
- **Switch off screens.** Turn off electronic devices an hour before bed (or dim them and block the blue light). It isn't only the bright light — phones and television also serve up stimulating images and content.

4 Set up your bedroom for sleep

- **Sleep on a comfortable bed** — a supportive mattress and pillows that suit you.
- **Keep it dark, quiet, and cool.** A comfortably cool room (around 18°C) is best. Blackout curtains or an eye mask help with light; earplugs, or a fan, or a white noise app help with noise.

Recommendations consistent with guidance from the Sleep Foundation, the UCLH Insomnia Team (NHS), and evening-exercise research from Concordia University and ETH Zurich.

Dr. Neil Levitsky • CBT-I Program • cognitivetoronto.com