

Healthy Sleep and Chinese Medicine

Sleep disorders affect at least 40 million Americans and are among the conditions most commonly treated by Chinese medicine practitioners. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal therapies can help calm the nervous system and address the underlying factors causing poor quality sleep. Chinese medicine is a holistic practice that bases diagnosis and treatment on an individual's relationship with their environment. In addition to acupuncture and herbs, practitioners recommend preventative health care solutions based on diet, exercise and the habits of daily life.

In addition to the regular care by a health care provider, try these tips to improve your sleep:

- **Get regular exercise** – Aerobic exercise can help you fall asleep faster, get deeper sleep, and wake less often throughout the night. However, since exercise raises body temperature and a cooler body temperature is associated with the onset of sleep, it is recommended that you not exercise in the last few hours before your bedtime.
- **Keep a regular sleep schedule** – Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, helps to set your natural sleep/wake cycle. Try to resist the temptation to sleep in, even on the weekends.
- **Get natural light exposure** – Getting exposure to the sun helps set the body's sleep/wake cycle. Try to get outside for at least 30 minutes of natural sunlight exposure every day.
- **Reserve your bedroom for relaxation** – Use it for sleep, intimacy, and peaceful activities only. Make it as dark as possible during sleep, comfortably cool, and quiet.
- **Eat a reasonable dinner well before bedtime** – Eat several hours before going to bed so your body can focus on resting instead of digestion.
- **Relax before going to bed** – Make sure to leave time at the end of the day to unwind before going to sleep. Developing a routine of relaxing activities like reading, listening to music, or meditation before bed can make it easier to fall asleep.
- **Soak your feet in warm water or take a warm bath before bedtime** – Foot soaks are a traditional treatment in Chinese Medicine to help balance and calm the body before sleep. Baths can help relaxation, and the drop in body temperature after bathing can help you feel sleepy.
- **Keep a sleep diary** – It is helpful to track sleep habits, the quality of your sleep and how it relates to your daily activities and diet. Writing a few lines about your day or things you are worried about can also be helpful to clear your mind before going to sleep.
- **Limit alcohol consumption, avoid stimulants and don't smoke** – Stay away from caffeinated beverages and food after 1:00 PM, or eliminate them altogether if you are sensitive to caffeine. Have no more than one drink a day, at least two hours before bedtime. Although alcohol is a sedative, it interferes with deep sleep, causing restlessness during the night once the sedative effects have worn off. Nicotine is a stimulant, making falling asleep and staying asleep more difficult.



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