

Exercise and Sleep

Exercise improves the quality of sleep, total sleep time and sleep efficiency. The activity should be cardiovascular exercise, such as a brisk walk or bike ride, in which you keep your heart rate up and your muscles pumping continuously for at least 20 minutes. Although strength-training, stretching, yoga, and other methods of exercise are beneficial, none match the sleep-enhancing benefits of cardiovascular exercise.

Vigorous exercise in the late afternoon or early evening appears to have the most direct effect on getting a good night's sleep. Exercise at this time will raise your body temperature above normal a few hours before bed, allowing it to start falling just as you're getting ready for bed. This decrease in body temperature appears to be a trigger that helps ease you into sleep.

Morning exercise can relieve stress and improve mood, which can indirectly improve sleep. To get a more direct sleep-promoting benefit from morning exercise, you can couple it with exposure to outdoor light. Exposure to natural light in the morning, whether you're exercising or not, can improve your sleep at night by reinforcing your body's sleep-wake cycle.

Vigorous exercise before bed or within three hours of your bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep. It is often thought a good workout before bed helps you feel more tired; however, vigorous exercise stimulates your heart, brain and muscles, and raises your body temperature, the opposite of what you want at bedtime.

Try to schedule at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise three or four times a week. Choose whatever activity you enjoy. Walk to and from work or walk the dog. Jog, swim, bike, ski, jump rope, dance or play tennis — just make it part of your routine.



Article written by
Dr. Sundara Munagala, M.D.,
Mercy Outpatient Psychiatry
319-369-4777.