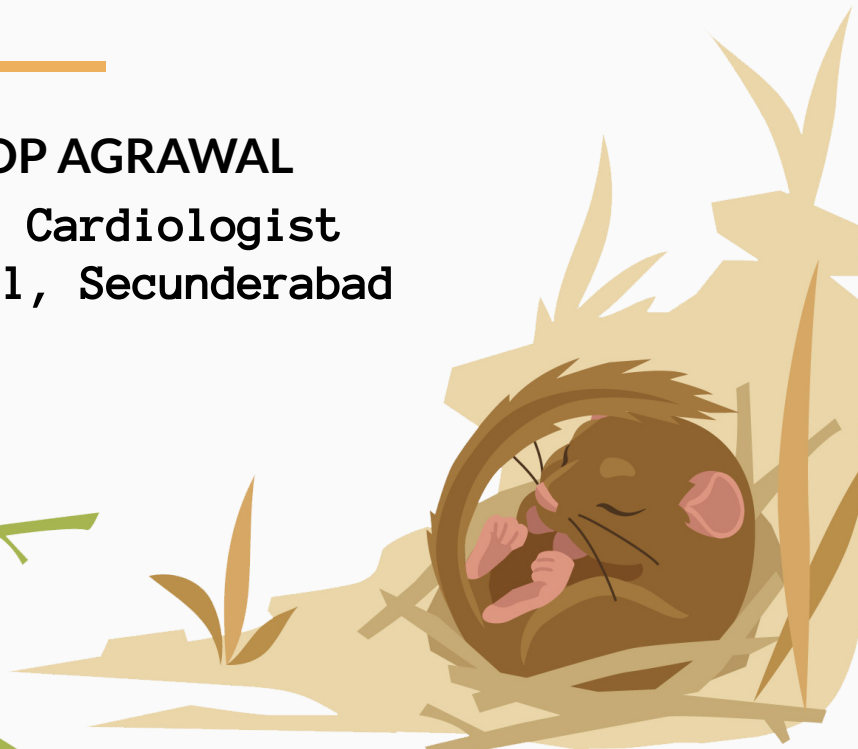


Secrets of Sleep



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Sleep Hygiene Essentials

1 Sleep schedule

A fixed or predictable sleep/wake schedule trains your mind and body. Time acts as a sleep trigger. Even if you have difficulty initiating sleep, wake up at a fixed time. This will eventually set your sleep cycle.

2 Sleep ritual

A set of activities, if done every time prior to bed, becomes a sleep ritual. Such rituals trick your brain into believing that it's bedtime, hence triggering sleep. The key is to perform these acts only at bedtime, and NOT to be done at other times. For example:

1. Putting on a fixed colour pyjama or using a fixed colour/pattern bedsheet. Upon waking up, you should change the pyjama or the bedsheet immediately to maintain the cue to the brain.
2. Washing your feet, brushing your teeth, and/or taking a warm shower.
3. Listening to a fixed song, or reading a set of pages.

3 Behavioural changes to promote a healthy sleep pattern

1. Use bedroom exclusively for sleep and intimacy ONLY.
2. If you can't fall asleep within 15 minutes, get up and step out of the room. Engage in light physical activity and try again after 15-20 minutes (or whenever you feel sleepy).
3. No electronics or screen for at least 30 prior to scheduled bedtime
4. Use a blue light filter on your screens after sunset
5. Avoid exposure to bright light from evening onwards
6. Exposure to bright light during morning hours promotes a healthy sleep pattern
7. Avoid long daytime naps (<30 minutes afternoon nap is unlikely to disturb nighttime sleep pattern)
8. Remove clocks from the bedroom
9. If work stress interferes with sleep, make a 'to-do list' well before going to bed. Avoid taking stressors to your bed

4 Diet and exercise

1. Maintain a 2-hour gap from dinner to bedtime. If you feel hungry prior to bed, take a light snack or milk. Such snacks can be part of a sleep ritual as well.
2. Avoid alcohol, coffee, or smoking at least 4 hours prior to bedtime. Alcohol fragments the sleep cycle and acts as an impediment to developing healthy sleep hygiene.
3. Moderate or heavy exercise if performed during morning or daytime promotes nighttime sleep. The same, if performed late in the evening or night, leads to excessive tiredness and may interfere with good night sleep. Light exercise or a gentle stroll in the evening is helpful to promote sleep. Yoga or meditation is good.

5 Environment

1. Cool ambient temperature and comfortable bedding are basic essentials.
2. Dim light (or complete dark) helps in falling asleep. Similarly, attempts should be made to cancel any noise. If noise can not be completely eliminated, a white noise machine may help (fan acts as an excellent white noise generator)
3. Calming scents like lavender can be tried (either as an air mist, or a pillow spray)