The National Sleep Foundation

1. *Keep a regular sleep schedule*. Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in our brain & the body's need to balance both sleep time & wake time. That is also why it is important to keep a regular bedtime & wake-time, <u>even on the weekends</u> when there is the temptation to sleep-in or stay up late.

2. *Avoid caffeine*. Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it can produce an alerting effect. Caffeine products, such as coffee, tea, colas & chocolate, remain in the body on average from 3-5 hours, but can affect some people up to 12 hours later. Even if you do not think caffeine affects you, it may be disrupting & changing the quality of your sleep. Avoiding caffeine within 6-8 hours of going to bed can help improve sleep quality.

3. *Avoid nicotine*. Nicotine is also a stimulant. Smoking before bed makes it more difficult to fall asleep. When smokers go to sleep, they experience withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, which also cause sleep problems. Nicotine can cause difficulty falling asleep, problems waking in the morning, & may also cause nightmares. Difficulty sleeping is just one more reason to quit smoking.

4. *Avoid alcohol*. Although many people think of alcohol as a sleep aid because of its sedating effect, it actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings. Consuming alcohol leads to a night of less restful sleep.

5. *Don't eat or drink too much close to bedtime*. Eating or drinking too much may make you less comfortable when settling down for bed. It is best to avoid a heavy meal too close to bedtime. Also, spicy foods may cause heartburn, which leads to difficulty falling asleep & discomfort during the night. Try to restrict fluids close to bedtime to prevent nighttime awakenings to go to the bathroom, though some people find milk or herbal, non-caffeinated teas to be soothing & a helpful part of a bedtime routine.

6. *Exercise at the right time promotes sleep*. In general, exercising regularly makes it easier to fall asleep & contributes to sounder sleep. However, exercising sporadically or right before going to bed will make falling asleep more difficult. In addition to making us more alert, our body temperature rises during exercise, & takes as much as 6 hours to begin to drop. A cooler body temperature provides a signal that it is time to sleep. Finish your exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime. Late afternoon exercise is the perfect way to help you fall asleep at night.

7. *Use relaxing bedtime rituals*. A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime conducted away from bright lights sends a signal to your body that it is almost time to go to sleep & will make it easier to fall asleep. Avoid arousing activities before bedtime like working, paying bills, engaging in competitive games or family problem-solving activities. Try an activity that is relaxing, such as soaking in a hot tub, reading or listening to music. Some studies suggest that soaking in hot water (such as a hot tub or bath) before retiring to bed can ease the transition into deeper sleep, but it should be done early enough that you are no longer sweating or over-heated. If you are unable to avoid tension & stress, it may be helpful to learn relaxation therapy from a trained professional.

8. *Create a sleep-promoting environment*. Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep – cool, quiet, dark, comfortable & free of interruptions. Also make your bedroom reflective of the value you place on sleep. Check your room for noise or other distractions, including light, & a dry or hot environment. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise," humidifiers & other devices. Make sure your mattress is comfortable & supportive —the one you have been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy—about 9 or 10 years for most good quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows & make the room attractive & inviting for sleep, but also free of allergens that might affect you & objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

9. *Associate your bed with sleep only*. Use your bed only for sleep to strengthen the association between bed & sleep. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine. For example, if looking at a bedroom clock makes you anxious about how much time you have before you must get up, move the clock out of sight. Do not engage in activities that cause you anxiety & prevent you from sleeping.

10. *Limit sleep time in bed*. If you do not fall asleep within 15-20 minutes of going to bed & turning out the lights, it is best to get out of bed & do another relaxing activity until you are feeling sleepy again. If anxiety about something you need to do prevents you from sleeping, it is sometimes helpful to jot down notes in a "worry" or "to do" book. Nap during the day only when needed to maintain alertness & plan on napping 20-30 minutes.