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Five Basic Strategies to Develop a Regular Sleeping Routine[i]

1. Never oversleep
Never oversleep because of a poor night's sleep. This is the most crucial rule. Get up at about the same time every day, especially on the morning after you've lost sleep. Sleeping late for just a couple of days can reset your body clock to a different cycle -- you'll be getting sleepy later and waking up later.

2. Set your body clock
Light helps restart your body clock to its active daytime phase. When you wake up, go outside and get some sunlight. Or if that's difficult, turn on all the lights in your room. Then walk around for a few minutes. The calves of your legs act as pumps and get blood circulating, carrying more oxygen to your brain to help get you going.

3. Exercise
Keep physically active during the day. This is especially important the day after a bad night's sleep. When you sleep less, you should be more active during the day. Being less active is one of the worst things an insomniac can do. Strenuous exercise (brisk walking, swimming, jogging, etc.) in late afternoon seems to promote more restful sleep. Also, insomniacs tend to be too inactive a couple of hours before bed. Do some gentle exercise.

4. Don't nap
Do not take any naps the day after you've lost sleep. When you feel sleepy, get up and do something. Walk, make the bed, or do your errands. While studying, get up regularly (every 30 minutes, or more often if necessary) to walk around your room. Do a gentle stretch. That will increase the flow of oxygen to your brain and help you to be more alert.

5. Set a bedtime schedule using these two steps:
First, try to go to bed at about the same time every night. Be regular. Most people get hungry at 7 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. because they've eaten at those times for years. Going to bed at about the same time every night can make sleep as regular as hunger.

Second, go to bed later when you are having trouble sleeping. If you're only getting five hours of sleep a night during your insomnia period, don't go to bed until just five hours before your wake-up time. For instance, if you've been waking up at 7 a.m., don't go to bed until 2 a.m. No naps! Make the time you spend in bed sleep time.

Still have some insomnia? Go to bed proportionately later. Then, as your time in bed becomes good sleep time, move your going-to-bed time back 15 to 30 minutes a night and do that for a week or so. This is the opposite of what we want to do: we want to go to bed earlier to make up the lost sleep. Learn to do what many sleep laboratories teach -- go to bed later the night after losing sleep.

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[i] Adapted from Danskin, D.G. (1989). *How to get a Good Night's Sleep*. Kansas: University Counseling Services, Kansas State University