



Having a wind-down routine

This strategy is suggested in the BrainWaves lessons: **11-14 Sleep, screens and mood** and **14-16 Building good sleep habits**

About the strategy

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends following a consistent bedtime routine and establishing a relaxing setting at bedtime as part of good 'sleep hygiene'. A practical routine might last 30–60 minutes before bed, and include things such as:

- Stopping work/study and finishing mentally demanding tasks.
- Avoiding high-stimulating activities (social media, intense movies/TV, gaming)
- Putting screens away and dimming the lights
- Doing something relaxing - reading, stretching, breathing exercises, meditation.
- Keeping the routine broadly consistent from night to night.

Such routines can provide consistent cues that prepare the brain and body for sleep. The key isn't that things are done in a particular sequence - it's about reducing arousal, creating a predictable cue for sleep, and maintaining a stable schedule.

The scientific evidence behind the strategy

There is limited evidence about the specific impact of winding-down routines on sleep, mostly because to work, such routines have to be specific to the individual, whereas standardised trials require every participant to do the exact same thing. When bedtime routines *are* studied, they are usually packaged into a broader set of recommendations called 'sleep hygiene'. While specific routine steps (like drinking chamomile tea or reading a physical book) are interchangeable and depend on personal preference, the core mechanics behind a routine *do* have strong scientific support:

1. **Schedule Regularity:** Going to bed and waking up at the same time is one of the most robust, evidence-backed predictors of sleep quality.
2. **Reducing Parasympathetic Arousal:** Activities that lower your heart rate and muscle tension (deep breathing, warm baths, dimming overhead lights) make it biologically easier for the body to transition into sleep.

Further reading

This article from the Harvard Medical School suggests creating a relaxing bedtime routine:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthy-aging-and-longevity/sleep-hygiene-simple-practices-for-better-rest>

This page from the Evelina Children's hospital provides a whole host of information for young people about sleep, body clocks and how to try and manage their sleep patterns:

<https://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/sleep-medicine-department/how-to-sleep-well-for-teenagers.aspx>

*** Note on Insomnia:** While wind-down routines are often supported for general sleep health and stress management, clinical research shows that sleep hygiene alone is rarely sufficient to treat chronic clinical insomnia.