



Sleep Hygiene for Aviation Personnel: A Guide to Better Rest

Why is Sleep So Important in Aviation?

Your job in aviation demands peak performance. Every decision you make, every control input, relies on a sharp mind and quick reflexes. **Fatigue is a major threat to aviation safety.** Just like a worn-out engine, a sleep-deprived brain can't perform its best. Good sleep helps you:

- **Think clearly:** Make accurate decisions under pressure.
 - **React quickly:** Respond to unexpected situations.
 - **Remember vital information:** Recall procedures, checklists, and instructions.
 - **Manage stress:** Handle challenges with a calm mind.
 - **Maintain your health:** Stay well to keep flying!
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What is "Sleep Hygiene"?

Sleep hygiene simply means having good habits that help you get quality sleep regularly. It's about setting yourself up for success when it comes to rest.

Top Tips for Aviation Personnel to Improve Their Sleep

1. Stick to a Schedule (When Possible):

- Try to go to bed and wake up around the same time every day, even on your days off. This helps regulate your body's internal clock (circadian rhythm).
- When crossing time zones, try to adjust your sleep schedule gradually before and after your trip.

2. Create a Relaxing Bedtime Routine:

- About an hour before bed, start winding down. This could include reading, taking a warm shower, listening to calming music, or stretching.
- Avoid work-related tasks, intense exercise, or stressful discussions close to bedtime.

3. Optimize Your Sleep Environment:

- **Dark:** Make your bedroom as dark as possible. Use blackout curtains or an eye mask. Even small amounts of light can disrupt sleep.

- **Quiet:** Minimize noise. Earplugs or a white noise machine can be helpful, especially in hotels.
- **Cool:** Keep your bedroom at a comfortable, slightly cool temperature (ideally between 18-20°C).
- **Comfortable:** Ensure your mattress, pillows, and bedding are supportive and comfortable.

4. Watch Your Diet and Drinks:

- **Limit Caffeine:** Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, energy drinks, some sodas) at least 6 hours before bedtime.
- **Go Easy on Alcohol:** While alcohol might make you feel sleepy, it disrupts sleep quality and can lead to awakenings later in the night. Avoid it close to bedtime.
- **Late Meals:** Avoid heavy, fatty, or spicy meals close to bedtime. A light snack is okay if you're hungry.

5. Be Smart About Naps:

- Naps can be useful for managing fatigue.
- Keep naps short (20-30 minutes, or "power naps") to avoid grogginess upon waking. Longer naps can be helpful if you have a significant sleep debt, but try to limit them to 90 minutes.

6. Manage Light Exposure:

- **Morning Light:** Expose yourself to bright light soon after waking up, especially if you're adjusting to a new time zone. This helps reset your body clock.
- **Evening Light:** Dim lights in the evening. Avoid bright screens (phones, tablets, computers) for at least an hour before bed as the blue light can interfere with melatonin production.

7. Get Regular Exercise (But Not Too Close to Bed):

- Regular physical activity can significantly improve sleep quality.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days.

When to Seek Help:

If you consistently struggle with sleep despite practicing good sleep hygiene, or if you suspect you have a sleep disorder (like sleep apnea or insomnia), **talk to your healthcare provider and your Civil Aviation Medical Examiner.** Untreated sleep disorders can seriously impact your health and flight safety.

Your Rest Matters. Fly Safe, Sleep Well!

