

Tips for better sleep



It may take you awhile to figure out exactly what you need to do to improve your sleep. You might have to try different things, and even make some difficult changes. More and more research shows the incredible importance of sleep, though—some experts even say it is more important than exercise or eating well! Use the following tips as a starting point. Create your own routine—based on your life and your body—to get the best sleep of your life.

Be realistic.

To get enough good quality sleep, you DO have to make changes to both your habits and your environment. And you probably have to give something up. But if you focus on getting plenty of good-quality of sleep, you'll be more productive, feel more alert, and avoid (some) crabbiness.

Figure out what works for you.

Do you prefer complete silence or white noise? Does the scent of lavender help you relax? Experiment with different routines. Pay very close attention to what works and what doesn't.

Rise and shine.

Wake up within 1 to 2 hours of the same time every day, including weekends. Although many people love to sleep in on weekends, waking up at the same time each day can put you to sleep faster at night and keep your sleep cycle more regular.

Hit the sack.

Similarly, go to bed within 1 to 2 hours of the same time every day.

Create a routine.

Find a relaxing activity to do before bedtime that will calm you from the stress of your day, such as taking a bath, reading or listening to soothing music.

Set yourself up for “sleep success.”

The ideal sleeping environment is cool, quiet, dark and comfortable. Avoid the blare of loud noises. If your partner snores or there are other loud noises you can't control, consider ear plugs or white noise humidifiers. Black-out curtains work well to block out bright sun, especially for shift workers or those who need to sleep during the day.

Don't just lie there.

If you can't sleep after about 20 minutes, get up. Leave your bedroom and do something relaxing. Return to bed when you are sleepy.

Trouble-shoot snoring.

Is snoring a problem? Try sleeping on your side or stomach. Sleeping on your back allows gravity to pull on the soft tissues of your throat and neck, causing the airway to narrow or collapse completely. Sleeping on your side or stomach may help improve your breathing. Snoring may also be an indication of a more serious problem called sleep apnea.

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Move.

Regular exercise is great for your overall health and can lead to a sounder sleep. Remember to keep heavy exertion limited to early hours, at least six hours before bedtime. Or, if doing mild exercise, do at least three/four hours or more before bedtime.

Caffeinate appropriately.

Beware of caffeine before sleeping. Caffeine products such as coffee, cola, some tea and even chocolate, act as a stimulant and can rev up your body. Most experts recommend avoiding caffeine within six hours of bedtime.

Avoid alcohol.

And although you might think a glass of wine may relax you before bed, alcohol disrupts sleep and can cause nighttime awakenings. Remember to stay away from alcohol when taking sleeping pills.

Nap cautiously.

Limit or skip napping especially during the daytime hours. However, if naps are necessary, take them in the early afternoon and limit to less than one hour.

Deal with your stress.

Being stressed out won't help you sleep any better. Try to deal with the causes of stress and also incorporate stress management techniques into your life. Basically—relax, have some fun, and breathe deep!

Stop smoking.

Besides the proven health risks, nicotine is a stimulant and can cause difficulty falling asleep. When a smoker goes to sleep, he or she experiences nicotine withdrawal which can disrupt sleep patterns.

Limit screen-time.

Keep screens of all types—phones, TVs, tablets—out of your bedroom. Stop looking at screens about an hour before bed.

Keep a sleep diary.

If you have problems sleeping, keep a sleep journal (like [this one](#) from the National Sleep Foundation) and note your sleep patterns, problems and routines. Show to your doctor and evaluate whether you would benefit from seeing a sleep specialist.

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Let the light in.

Get as much light as possible during the day. It triggers your biological clock to get sleepy at the appropriate times.

Your bedroom shouldn't have to multitask.

Associate your bed and bedroom with sleep only.

Weigh the positives and negatives of sleep medications.

Pay attention to whether you actually feel better the day after you take a medication. Notice side effects. Talk to your doctor if you feel like you need to take medication in order to sleep, or if you take them for a week at a time or more.

Help your family sleep better.

If the people you live with don't sleep well, chances are you won't sleep well either. Help them incorporate some of these tips into their own lives as well, and everyone will benefit.

Every night counts.

When you don't get enough sleep, you start creating a "sleep debt." Bouncing back from a few too many late nights may take more than just sleeping in on the weekends. If you have lost too much sleep, one or two days of extra sleep may not be enough to get rid of your sleep debt. Certainly, sleeping in on Saturday won't make up for any poor performance or crabbiness you had earlier that week. The moral of the story? Focus on enough good quality of sleep every single day.

Know the goal.

Maximize both the quality of sleep and the hours spent sleeping.

Need more information?

Start with the National Sleep Foundation's website at sleepfoundation.org for tons of great, research-backed information.

Next step

Use a sleep diary for at least a few days. The National Sleep Foundation has a great one, located at <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-diary/SleepDiaryv6.pdf>

Check in after one week. What did you learn?

What would you like to try to improve your sleep?