

How To Get A Better Night's Sleep in **8 Easy Steps**



Whether you're just waking up to the fact you aren't getting enough shut-eye, or you are finally ready to change your sleep patterns for the better, these 8 tips will help you get the rest you need.

Sleep is the most natural thing in the world and yet 50 to 70 million adults in the U.S. struggle with it.



1 **STICK TO A BEDTIME ROUTINE**

Brains, like children, are creatures of habit. So if you want to convince your brain that, yes, it's time to stop worrying about your PowerPoint presentation and go to sleep, one of your best weapons is a consistent, relaxing routine. Not only will you have an easier time falling asleep, you'll also benefit from deeper, better sleep.

1. Shelve your work.

Don't bring your laptop or any other work-related materials into your bed.

2. Exercise noise control.

If your neighbors insist on letting their Dobermans howl at the moon each night, if you live within earshot of the freeway, or if you just have a loud household, drown out the offending noise with your own white noise generator, fans, or soothing recordings of the rain or ocean.

3. Turn down the thermostat.

Most people sleep best in rooms that are approximately 65° F (18° C) and that have adequate ventilation.

4. Bed down in comfort.

If you frequently wake up with a sore back or neck, you may need to invest in a new mattress or try a different pillow. Make sure you have enough room to stretch and turn comfortably while you sleep.



2 ESTABLISH A SLEEP-WAKE SCHEDULE

Just as your brain benefits from a bedtime routine, your body thrives when you strictly observe its circadian rhythm (the natural sleep-wake cycle). Getting the same amount of sleep each day is great, but what's really going to make you feel refreshed and energetic is observing the same bedtime and wake-time each day. Consistency is key.

1. Set a regular bedtime.

Play around with bedtimes until you find one that works for you. Most adults go to bed between 10 and 11 each night.

2. Wake up at the same time every day.

Once you establish a workable routine, you'll gradually be able to get up without an alarm (or the snooze button!).

3. Nap to make up for lost sleep.

Naps are a great way to get back on track. Just try not to make them about 30-60 minutes long, and don't make them a habit.

4. Fight after-dinner drowsiness.

It can be so tempting to tuck in after a big meal, but letting your food digest properly means staying awake for a few hours to let your body do its job. The benefit? You'll sleep better on an empty stomach.



3 GET BACK TO NATURE FOR A SLEEP-WAKE CYCLE

Melatonin is the hormone responsible for inducing that drowsy, sleepy feeling that signals bedtime. Since light exposure directly affects melatonin production, and since modern life has all but eclipsed nature in creating and controlling light, it's important to be mindful of what you're exposed to throughout the day. Here's how to get back on nature's track (and get your brain on a healthy schedule).

1. Increase light exposure during the day.

Step outside without your sunglasses and hat first thing in the morning to tell your brain it's time to wake up, and try to get outside a few times throughout the day. (Letting natural light into your home or workspace is another means to this end.) If you work in a windowless office, or if you live someplace where there's limited daylight, consider investing in a light therapy box to simulate sunshine and its effects on melatonin production.

2. Turn off your television and computer after hours.

Boosting melatonin production at night requires some effort in this digital age. For example, never use the television to fall asleep, since its light suppresses

melatonin production, and its content stimulates the mind. Instead, listen to music or audio books, practice relaxation exercises and if you read, do so with an old-fashioned book. Backlit devices like tablets throw a wrench in melatonin production.

3. Using low-wattage bulbs in the bedroom.

Wherever you spend your evening hours, try opting for dimmer light settings or bulbs.

4. Blackout for bedtime.

The darker your bedroom is, the better you'll sleep. Cover or turn off electrical displays, use heavy curtains or shades to block light from windows or try a sleep mask to cover your eyes. If you do wake up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom or attend to children, use a flashlight instead of room lights. Keeping things as dark as possible will make it easier for you to go back to sleep.



4 DON'T GIVE INTO STRESS AND ANXIETY

There's a reason so many clichés about sleep and stress exist. (Think "Sleep on it," "Losing sleep" and so on.) Stress is one of the biggest disruptors to a good night's rest. Anxiety, stress, and anger can all keep you up at night, so pay attention to what's on your mind if you are having trouble falling asleep. Pinpointing the source of these emotions is your first step toward keeping them in check. Of course, that's easier said than done. Sometimes, all you can do is learn how to relax before bed. A few effective techniques include:

1. Deep breathing.

Close your eyes, clear your mind and take deep, slow breaths for about two to five minutes. Try making each breath even deeper than the last.

2. Progressive muscle relaxation.

Clench all the muscles as tightly as you can in your toes; then completely relax. Try the same thing with your calf muscles, your thigh muscles, and so on all the way up to the top of your head.

3. Visualizing a peaceful, restful place.

Close your eyes and picture a place or activity that makes you feel calm and relaxed. Take that feeling with you to bed.



5 MAINTAIN A HEALTHY DIET AND EXERCISE ROUTINE

Diet and exercise have profound effects on your sleep patterns, especially when it comes to eating before bed. Here's how you can harness that primal power.

1. Avoid eating big meals at night.

Avoid snacks and meals before bedtime. The process of digestion can be a disruption to the sleep process. Consider early evening meals and give yourself several hours between the last food intake of the day and bedtime.

2. Just say no to alcohol before bed.

A popular myth is that alcohol will help you obtain a good night's sleep. Alcohol may usher you to sleep quicker than usual, but it undermines the quality of sleep you will obtain for the remainder of the night.

3. Limit caffeine.

Think that afternoon latte isn't a problem? Think again. Caffeine can interfere with sleep up to 10 to 12 hours after ingesting it! Consider switching to water or decaf after lunch, or cutting back on your overall intake.

4. Sip less at night.

It seems obvious but bears repeating: Don't drink a lot before bed, or you'll be waking up for bathroom breaks. In particular, avoid caffeinated drinks, which act as diuretics (and keep you up anyway!).

5. Stop smoking.

Nicotine is a stimulant, and as such it can disrupt sleep. Additionally, smokers may experience nicotine withdrawal as the night wears on, which can also cause wakefulness.



6 BALANCE A SLEEP-SCHEDULE DISRUPTED BY NIGHTTIME WORK

Your job may require you to work nights or irregular shifts, but your brain probably didn't get the memo. The result can be minor (with impacts to your mood, energy or concentration) or major (with increased risk of accident and injury). To avoid these and other problems, consider the following:

1. Regulate the irregular.

Limiting the number of night or irregular shifts you work in a row can do a lot of good, especially when it comes to preventing a buildup of sleep deprivation. If that's not possible, avoid rotating shifts frequently so you can maintain a more consistent sleep schedule.

2. Spend less time driving.

A long commute cuts into sleep time, and worse, a long drive home during the daytime makes it that much harder to convince your brain it's time to sleep when you finally get home.

3. Keep an eye on caffeine.

Consume caffeine early in your shift, but avoid it close to bedtime.

4. Get a move on.

Take as many breaks as you can to walk, stretch, or even exercise.

5. Live by a different set of rules.

If nighttime work is in your foreseeable future, adjust your schedule accordingly. Expose yourself to bright light when you wake up at night, and use bright lamps or daylight-simulation bulbs in your workplace. Going home, wear dark glasses to block out sunlight, and create as serene a sleep environment as possible with blackout curtains, a sleep mask, earplugs and/or a sound machine to mask noise from the outside. Don't forget to turn off your phone and other electronic devices!

6. Repay your sleep debt.

Make sleeping your top priority on weekends and non-working days so you can catch up on the shut-eye you've missed during the week.



7 LEARN HOW TO FALL BACK ASLEEP

Sleeping happens in cycles, and it's normal to wake up in between them at night. The difference between good sleepers and bad sleepers, however, is what comes next. A good sleeper usually doesn't remember the interruption, whereas poor sleepers often have trouble falling back asleep. Here's how to avoid that pitfall.

1. Remain in bed.

Give your brain and body the physical cues they need to go back to sleep by staying in bed in a relaxed position.

2. Focus on relaxing, not sleeping.

Trying to fall asleep can backfire if you're all keyed up. Instead, think about how you need to relax—not necessarily sleep—and try a relaxation technique such as visualization, deep breathing, or meditation to get you there. The best part is that you can do all of these without getting out of bed.

3. Stay quiet and calm, even if you have to get out of bed.

If you can't fall back asleep after 15 minutes, get out of bed and read a book or do something else quiet and

non-stimulating in another room. Be sure to keep the lights dim and avoid screens of any kind—computers, TV, cell phones, iPads—so you don't inadvertently tell your brain it's time to wake up. When your body craves sleep, return to the bedroom and attempt to fall asleep again. Repeat this process until your body learns how to fall asleep.

4. Avoid strenuous mental activity.

If anxiety wakes you up at night, write it down and tell yourself you'll worry about it in the morning when you're refreshed. Alternately, if you can't sleep because you have a great idea you want to flesh out, simply make a note of it on paper and go back to bed, confident you'll do a better job with it after a good night's sleep.



8 KNOW WHEN TO GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

If none of the tips in this booklet resolve your sleep problems, or if you suffer from any of the following symptoms, you may have a severe sleeping disorder that if left untreated can lead to a growing number of serious health issues:

1. Persistent daytime sleepiness or fatigue
2. Loud snoring punctuated by pauses in breathing
3. Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
4. Sleep that fails to refresh you
5. Frequent morning headaches
6. Crawling sensations in your legs or arms at night
7. Inability to move while falling asleep or waking up
8. Physically acting out dreams during sleep
9. Falling asleep at inappropriate times

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