Seven Tips for Getting a Good Night’s Sleep

01. Keep a regular sleep schedule

Getting in sync with your body’s natural sleep-wake cycle—your circadian rhythm—is one of the most important strategies for achieving good sleep. If you keep a regular sleep schedule, going to bed and getting up at the same time each day, you will feel much more refreshed and energized than if you sleep the same number of hours at different times. This holds true even if you alter your sleep schedule by only an hour or two. Consistency is vitally important.

- **Set a regular bedtime.** Go to bed at the same time every night. Choose a time when you normally feel tired, so that you don’t toss and turn. Try not to break this routine on weekends when it may be tempting to stay up late. If you want to change your bedtime, help your body adjust by making the change in small daily increments, such as 15 minutes earlier or later each day.
- **Wake up at the same time every day.** If you’re getting enough sleep, you should wake up naturally without an alarm. If you need an alarm clock to wake up on time, you may need to set an earlier bedtime. As with your bedtime, try to maintain your regular wake-time even on weekends.
- **Nap to make up for lost sleep.** If you need to make up for a few lost hours, opt for a daytime nap rather than sleeping late. This strategy allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm, which often backfires in insomnia and throws you off for days.
- **Be smart about napping.** While taking a nap can be a great way to recharge, especially for older adults, it can make insomnia worse. If insomnia is a problem for you, consider eliminating napping. If you must nap, do it in the early afternoon, and limit it to thirty minutes.
- **Fight after-dinner drowsiness.** If you find yourself getting sleepy way before your bedtime, get off the couch and do something mildly stimulating to avoid falling asleep, such as washing the dishes, calling a friend, or getting clothes ready for the next day. If you give in to the drowsiness, you may wake up later in the night and have trouble getting back to sleep.

Discovering your optimal sleep schedule. Find a period of time (a week or two should do) when you are free to experiment with different sleep and wake times. Go to bed at the same time every night and allow yourself to sleep until you wake up naturally. No alarm clocks! If you’re sleep deprived, it may take a few weeks to fully recover. But as you go to bed and get up at the same time, you’ll eventually land on the natural sleep schedule that works best for you.
02. Naturally regulate your sleep-wake cycle

Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone controlled by light exposure that helps regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Melatonin production is controlled by light exposure. Your brain should secrete more in the evening, when it’s dark, to make you sleepy, and less during the day when it’s light and you want to stay awake and alert. However, many aspects of modern life can disrupt your body’s natural production of melatonin and with it your sleep-wake cycle. Spending long days in an office away from natural light, for example, can impact your daytime wakefulness and make your brain sleepy. Then bright lights at night—especially from hours spent in front of the TV or computer screen—can suppress your body’s production of melatonin and make it harder to sleep. However, there are ways for you to naturally regulate your sleep-wake cycle, boost your body’s production of melatonin, and keep your brain on a healthy schedule.

Increase light exposure during the day

- **Remove your sunglasses** in the morning and let light onto your face.
- **Spend more time outside during daylight.** Try to take your work breaks outside in sunlight, exercise outside, or walk your dog during the day instead of at night.
- **Let as much light into your home/workspace as possible.** Keep curtains and blinds open during the day, and try to move your desk closer to the window.
- **If necessary, use a light therapy box.** A light therapy box can simulate sunshine and can be especially useful during short winter days when there’s limited daylight.

 Boost melatonin production at night

- **Turn off your television and computer.** Many people use the television to fall asleep or relax at the end of the day, and this is a mistake. Not only does the light suppress melatonin production, but television can actually stimulate the mind, rather than relaxing it. If your favorite TV show is on late at night, record it for viewing earlier in the day.
- **Don’t read from a backlit device at night (such as an iPad).** If you use a portable electronic device to read, use an eReader that is not backlit, i.e. one that requires an additional light source such as a bedside lamp.
- **Change your bright light bulbs.** Avoid bright lights, use low-wattage bulbs instead.
- **When it’s time to sleep, make sure the room is dark.** The darker it is, the better you’ll sleep. Cover electrical displays, use heavy curtains or shades to block light from windows, or try a sleep mask to cover your eyes.
- **Use a flashlight to go to the bathroom at night.** If you wake up during the night to use the bathroom—as long as it’s safe to do so—keep the light to a minimum so it will be easier to go back to sleep.

03. Create a relaxing bedtime routine

A peaceful bedtime routine sends a powerful signal to your brain that it’s time to wind down and let go of the day’s stresses. **Make your bedroom more sleep friendly:** keep noise down; keep your room cool (around 65° F or 18° C) with adequate ventilation; make sure your bed is comfortable. **Reserve your bed for sleeping and sex:** If you associate your bed with events like work or errands, it will be
harder to wind down at night. Use your bed only for sleep and sex. That way, when you go to bed, your body gets a powerful cue: it’s time to either nod off or be romantic.

04. Eat right and get regular exercise

Your daytime eating and exercise habits play a role in how well you sleep. It’s particularly important to watch what you put in your body in the hours leading up to your bedtime: stay away from big meals at night; avoid alcohol before bed; cut down on caffeine; avoid drinking too many liquids in the evening; quit smoking.

You’ll also sleep more deeply if you exercise regularly. You don’t have to be a star athlete to reap the benefits. And you don’t need to do all 30 minutes in one session. Try a brisk walk, a bicycle ride, or even gardening or housework. Some people prefer to schedule exercise in the morning or early afternoon as exercising too late in the day can stimulate the body, raising its temperature. Even if you prefer not to exercise vigorously at night, don’t feel glued to the couch, though. Relaxing exercises such as yoga or gentle stretching can help promote sleep.

05. Get anxiety and stress in check

Do you find yourself unable to sleep or waking up night after night? Residual stress, worry, and anger from your day can make it very difficult to sleep well. When you wake up or can’t get to sleep, take note of what seems to be the recurring theme. That will help you figure out what you need to do to get your stress and anger under control during the day. If you can’t stop yourself from worrying, especially about things outside your control, you need to learn how to manage your thoughts. Even counting sheep is more productive than worrying at bedtime. If the stress of managing work, family, or school is keeping you awake, you may need help with stress management. By learning how to manage your time effectively, handle stress in a productive way, and maintain a calm, positive outlook, you’ll be able to sleep better at night.

Relaxation techniques for better sleep: deep breathing; progressive muscle relaxation; visualizing a peaceful place.

06. Ways to get back to sleep

- **Stay out of your head.** The key to getting back to sleep is continuing to cue your body for sleep, so remain in bed in a relaxed position. Hard as it may be, try not to stress over the fact that you’re awake or your inability to fall asleep again, because that very stress and anxiety encourages your body to stay awake. Focus on the feelings and sensations in your body.
- **Make relaxation your goal, not sleep.** If you find it hard to fall back asleep, try a relaxation technique which can be done without even getting out of bed.
- **Do a quiet, non-stimulating activity.** If you’ve been awake for more than 15 minutes, try getting out of bed and doing a quiet, non-stimulating activity, such as reading a book. Keep the lights dim so as not to cue your body clock that it’s time to wake up.
- **Postpone worrying and brainstorming.** If you wake during the night feeling anxious about something, make a brief note of it on paper and postpone worrying about it until the next day when you are fresh and it will be easier to resolve.