
Suggestions for Better Sleep

Achieving better sleep can lead to many health improvements. This list of suggestions for better sleep is not meant to be implemented in its entirety. Instead, pick three to four changes to implement to improve sleep quality.

Minimize or Avoid Stimulants

- Avoid alcohol (wine, beer, and hard liquor) within 3 hours of bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine-containing beverages or foods after 2 p.m.; if sensitive to caffeine, avoid it after 12 noon. (These items include Pepsi®, Coke®, Mountain Dew®; tea, coffee, lattes, and chocolate; and coffee- or espresso-containing ice creams or desserts). Read labels on everything you consume.
- Avoid Sudafed® or other decongestant cold medicines at night.
- Some medications may have stimulating effects. Consult your pharmacist and doctor to determine whether any of them might be contributing to sleep problems. Do not stop medicines without talking to your doctor.
- Complete aerobic exercise before 6 p.m. (or at least 3 hours before bed).

Nighttime Tension and Anxiety

- Avoid anxiety-provoking activities close to bedtime.
- Avoid watching the news or paying bills before going to bed.
- Avoid reading stimulating, exciting materials in bed.
- Avoid checking your financial reports or the stock market before bedtime.
- Avoid arguments before bedtime. Try to achieve some action plan or resolution of a discussion or argument before trying to go to sleep.
- Avoid repeated negative judgments about being unable to sleep.
- Use positive self-talk phrases about your ability to relax and fall asleep: "I can fall asleep." "I can relax."
- Write in a journal any disturbing thoughts running through your mind.
- Schedule a time in the next few days to deal with whatever is bothering you. If you're having trouble managing your concerns for more than a few weeks, ask your healthcare provider for treatment suggestions or a therapy referral.
- Many relaxing yoga or stress-reducing mindful breathing CDs or DVDs are available to help you find a relaxing bedtime ritual that works for you.

Sleep Planning and Preparation

- Plan your sleep by putting it into your schedule; plan for 8-9 hours in bed.
- As much as possible, go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day. This will help train your biological clock.
- Begin prepping for bedtime 30 minutes before getting in bed.
- Avoid getting in bed after 11 p.m. as late-hour sleep is not as helpful as earlier sleep.
- Avoid late-afternoon or evening naps.
- Avoid naps longer than 45 minutes unless you're ill or quite sleep-deprived.
- Avoid large meals or spicy foods before bed.
- Finish all eating 3 hours before going to sleep.
- Avoid drinking more than 4-8 ounces of fluid before going to bed.
- Take a hot salt/soda aromatherapy bath. Raising your body temperature before bed helps induce sleep. A hot bath also relaxes muscles. Add 1-2 cups Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate absorbed through the skin is very relaxing), ½ to 1 cup baking soda (sodium bicarbonate is alkalizing to a stressed-out, acidic body), and 10 drops lavender oil (helps lower cortisol).

Strategies to Use for Trouble Falling Asleep or Staying Asleep

- Don't stay in bed more than 20-30 minutes trying to fall asleep. Leave your bedroom and go to a relaxing room other than the bedroom and read or do a relaxation technique (e.g., meditation).
- Try reading a good neutral book under low light to help with falling asleep.
- If using a tablet or phone for reading, make sure they are in the nighttime setting and brightness is as low as possible.
- If using a light, don't use a table lamp. Instead, use a small light that only illuminates the reading material.
- If you awaken early because of light, put a dark covering over your eyes.
- If you awaken early due to recurrent thoughts, try writing them in a journal. If this doesn't help, consider counseling. Depression might be a factor.

Light, Noise, Temperature, and Environmental Issues

- Turn down the light in the bathroom and other rooms you are in 15 minutes before going to bed.
- Decrease the light in your bedroom by using a dimmer or a reading light with a dimmer.
- Consider using amber glasses for at least 30 minutes before bedtime to reduce light exposure.
- Use dark window shades or try a set of eye shades or a black covering for your eyes when trying to sleep or if you awaken too early because of light.

- Decrease irritating noises in your space by closing windows, using earplugs, or using a white noise generator or a HEPA air filter.
- Turn off or remove any appliances or clocks that make noise.
- Make sure your sleeping area is in the correct temperature range (not too hot or too cold).
- Avoid sleeping near electromagnetic fields (EMFs). Try to have your head at least 8 feet away from EMFs, if possible. Potential sources of EMFs include electrical outlets, clock radios, stereos, cell phones, and computers. Consider moving these devices or moving your bed or your position in the bed. Consider using a TriField® or other meter to test for EMFs.
- Avoid sleeping with an electric blanket on. Instead, turn on the blanket when prepping for bedtime, then turn it off when getting into bed.

Bedding and Pillows

- Consider replacing your pillows with hypoallergenic pillows. Use ultrafine allergy pillow and mattress covers.
- Consider using a “side sleeper” pillow under your neck when sleeping on your side.
- Consider using a body pillow to hug and put between your knees to align your back and shoulders at night.
- Roll backward at a slight angle onto a body pillow if you have hip bursitis or shoulder pain.
- Sleep on the highest quality bed linens you can afford.

Supplements and Light Therapy

- Consider taking supplements to aid your sleep, such as:
 - **Melatonin:** 1-5 mg to fall asleep and/or 5-20 mg time-released melatonin to stay asleep
 - **5-HTP:** 100-200 mg 1 hour before bedtime
 - **Taurine:** 500-2,000 mg 1 hour before bedtime
 - **Magnesium:** 200-400 mg is a typical dose
 - **Other:** To decrease nighttime cortisol or stress, consider using ashwagandha, phosphorylated serine, Lactium® casein decapeptide, L-theanine, or other calming herbs.
- Establish an evening herbal tea habit, such as lemon balm and passionflower, to support relaxation and sleep onset.
- Consider 30 minutes of exposure to a blue or 10,000 lux bright light first thing in the morning if you have been going to bed too late and want to shift to an earlier bedtime.