

Awaken your best.

8 Ways to Sleep Better Tonight
Physical, mental and emotional well-being



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INTRODUCTION

Doctors and psychologists tell us that between 7 and 8 hours sleep a night is essential to maintaining physical, mental, and emotional well-being.¹

When we sleep well, we wake up refreshed, alert, and able to put in a solid day's work. Researchers at Harvard Medical School also report that sleep is essential for the learning process,² strengthening the neural connections in our brains that help us to process new information.

If sleep is so important, why are so many people sleep deprived?

The biggest culprits are shift work, long hours, and irregular hours. But apart from work patterns, night time routines, diet, exercise, and other lifestyle factors can have a significant effect on our quality of sleep. The good news is that most of these things are under your control. And sometimes a small change in diet, environment, or exercise routine is all it takes to vastly improve the quality of your sleep. It just takes a bit of discipline and the willingness to change some of your habits.

Awaken your best.

By starting with these 8 tips below, you'll be well on the way to a better night's sleep.

8 WAYS TO SLEEP BETTER TONIGHT



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1. Make sure your environment is conducive to a good night's sleep.

Sometimes it's the simple things that make all the difference. An appropriate level of darkness, silence, and a cool temperature are important, and these are things you can easily maintain. Check your bedroom for sources of light, and change your curtains or get an eye mask if necessary so no light comes in from the street. Similarly, check the temperature. The optimal temperature for your room is between 15-19 degrees Celsius, which is just cool enough for your body to initiate sleep, and to stay asleep the whole night though without restlessness.

If you really want to turn your bedroom into a sleep haven, you should make sure your room is kept clutter-free, with no clothes, or work-related items lying around.

Also, make sure your bed is comfortable with a supportive mattress, and enough pillows to keep your spine and neck in a straight line.

Finally, sleep surveys indicate that scent may play a part in improving sleep outcomes,³ so it may be worth experimenting with aromatherapy or at least ensuring that sheets are cleaned regularly.

2. Switch off.

Are you in the habit of using your phone as an alarm clock, or checking Facebook before you go to sleep? If so, you're risking the quality of your sleep. The blue light⁴ that emits from screens is known to suppress melatonin, the hormone that controls your sleep/wake cycle.

Add to this the sound of late night alerts, emails, and messages coming through, and the fact that using technology late at night can trick your brain into thinking it needs to stay awake, and you're almost guaranteed of a restless night. So make sure you eliminate all electronic devices from your bedroom at least one hour before you want to go to sleep. If you must keep devices in your room, make sure you switch them over to night time mode.

Awaken your best nights sleep.

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3.

Set a sleep schedule—and stick with it.

When it comes to sleep, a little discipline goes a long way. Going to bed at the same time every night, and getting up at the same time every morning establishes a routine that your internal body clock gets used to, and this helps it to know when it should get ready for sleep.

If you regularly feel tired during the day or fall asleep on transport, or during lectures, you need to re-evaluate how much sleep you need.

Dr. Lawrence J. Epstein of Harvard University's medical school recommends keeping a diary⁵ to help you become familiar with your patterns of sleep and wakefulness. In the diary, you should include times you go to sleep, wake up, your total hours of sleep, whether you woke up during the night, and how you felt upon waking.

This will help you to determine how many hours of sleep you need.

4.

Do more exercise.

Something that's almost guaranteed to have a positive effect on your sleep cycle is exercise.⁶ 30 minutes of cardio a day is all it takes to get your body sleep ready in the evening, provided it's not done just before bed.

A good cardio workout like walking, running, swimming, or cycling increases your body temperature⁷ for around 4 hours. However, once the body starts to cool down, the brain releases melatonin, the hormone that's responsible for inducing sleep.

Therefore, it's best to leave yourself 4 hours between any intense exercise and your scheduled bed time. If you do want to do something in the evening, it's best to stick with some yoga or simple stretching.

The best time of day to exercise is first thing in the morning. Research shows that people who work out on a treadmill early in the morning spend 75% more time⁷ in the reparative stages of sleep than those who exercise later in the day.

The other optimal time for exercise is the afternoon, when your body can take advantage of its natural cooling down process, just in time for bed time.

Download our free E-book, *Keeping track of your sleep for a sample template you can use to track your sleep habits.*

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5.

Check your medication.

Medication, whether they are simple over-the-counter treatments or prescription drugs, can have a profound effect on the quality of your sleep.

If you're taking some type of medication, you should check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if it has any effects on your sleep.

Common over-the-counter medications that can affect on your sleep are cold and flu medications and painkillers. Antihistamines might make you drowsy, while decongestants might cause insomnia.

Painkillers contain caffeine, which can over stimulate the brain and inhibit your ability to sleep. Natural remedies that are used to treat depression can also over stimulate your brain in much the same ways that chemical drugs do.

If you do have any ailments that need to be treated with medication like chronic pain, check with your doctor to see if there are treatment options that do not disrupt your sleep.

6.

Watch what you drink.

When it comes to drinks, the biggest sleep deprivors are caffeine and alcohol. Most of us are aware that drinking coffee within 4 hours of bedtime might interfere with sleep, which is why switching over to decaffeinated after 3pm, or simply avoiding coffee altogether is best for maintaining good sleep patterns.

But many people aren't aware of the negative effects alcohol can have on sleep. A "nightcap" may work in the short term, but that last glass of wine can in fact inhibit the quality of sleep.

According to researchers,⁸ while alcohol helps our brains "turn off" more quickly, it also interferes with the sleep cycle as our body processes the substance. Alcohol can suppress rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which is the lightest stage of sleep, and when dreaming occurs.

With the consumption of alcohol, we drop into the deeper "slow wave" sleep earlier in the night, which can cause wakefulness in the middle of the night. Because the REM stage is key to the maintenance long-term memory, alcohol consumption not only reduces the restfulness of your sleep, but can also have long-term repercussions on wellbeing.

Alcohol can also have a diuretic effect on the body, causing you to wake up from sweating or sudden need to urinate. And with increased dosages of alcohol, breathing may be suppressed, increasing snoring and possibly interrupting breathing during sleep.

The best things to drink before bed are warm milk, which contains the substance tryptophan, which is a sleep-promoting substance, and herbal teas like chamomile, lavender, valerian, or a special sleepy-time mix.

You might also want to consider not drinking any liquid just before bed, as this increases the chances of needing to get up for a toilet break.

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7.

Be careful what you eat before bed

Now that we know of the wonders of tryptophan,⁹ a sleep-promoting substance found in dairy products, it's not hard to guess the best foods to eat before bed. That's right - other foods that are also high in tryptophan like nuts and seeds, bananas, honey, and eggs. And when you team them with carbohydrate-rich foods, they have an even stronger effect.

But be careful. You don't want to indulge too much, as too much snacking before bed can have the opposite effect. So does indulging in food that is high in fat, or food that is excessively spicy.

If you feel like you need a little something later in the evening, try these:

Walnuts:

High in melatonin, they're the perfect night time snack. They're also rather high in fat, so stick with one handful.

Bowl of jasmine rice:

Jasmine rice is high on the glycemic index, so a bowl of rice speeds up the production of tryptophan, and helps you fall asleep much sooner. Top it with a bit of natural yoghurt for some extra melatonin.

Banana smoothie with skim milk:

This one's great because it contains two of the best sleep-inducing foods, bananas and milk, together. Plus you'll be getting a good dose of vitamin D and calcium.

Small bowl of cereal:

We're used to eating cereal when waking up, but because of the combination of carbohydrates and milk, this can also work as a bedtime snack.

Cheese on toast:

According to a study in the British Journal of Nutrition, cheese is rich in casein proteins, which, when eaten 30 minutes before bed have been found to improve your metabolism the next day.

Cherries:

Cherries, particularly the sour kind, are very high in melatonin. And being a fruit, they're light and easily digestible, making them the perfect bedtime snack

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8.

Clear your mind

One of the most common problems faced by people who suffer from sleep disorders is the inability to turn off their minds.

If you find yourself tossing and turning while you go over your to-do list in your mind, spend 10 minutes in the evening turning your concerns into an action plan and write that plan down. Your mind will be satisfied that you have a plan to resolve any outstanding issues and won't feel the need to churn over them late at night. Put the paper away in your bag or with other items to be looked at the next day so you're not tempted to glance over at it before you go to sleep.

Another great exercise for clearing the mind is mindfulness meditation. This is a simple practice that allows you to focus on the breath while you stay in the present moment. Even 20 minutes a day is enough to get your brain used to being in relaxed mode, so that it stops focusing on things like work, to-do lists, and problems, and towards simply being in the moment, tuned in to what's happening around you, and not trying to be in control of anything.

Dr. Herbert Benson,¹⁰ director emeritus of the Harvard-affiliated Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine recommends practicing mindfulness meditation each night before you go to bed. He says 20 minutes a day is sufficient to get your brain used to being in relaxed mode.

The best posture for meditation¹¹ is sitting on something solid like a chair or a cushion on the floor with your legs crossed if you are sitting on a cushion, or with your feet directly on the ground if you are sitting on a chair. Sit up straight but keep your body relaxed, and let your head and shoulders rest on top of your vertebrae. With your hands resting comfortably, let yourself just sit like this and be still for a few minutes, or as long as you can.

While you are in this posture, check in with the breath. Feel your breath moving in and out of your nose, and eventually, you'll get into a rhythm, which will have a peaceful effect on your mind. If you find yourself obsessing about your thoughts, return to the breath and over time, the process will become easier, and the effects will flow on into other activities you do in your day.

Awaken your best mind.



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SWEET DREAMS

Before we conclude this guide, let's go over the 8 points again.

1. Your Sleep Environment – Have you made sure there is no light coming in to the room from the street? Are you minimizing, or blocking out noise, and is the room free of clutter?
2. Have you eliminated all electronic devices from your room, and switched off laptops, iPads and smartphones at least one hour before sleeping?
3. Are you going to bed and getting up at the same time every night?
4. Have you scheduled 30 minutes of cardio into your morning or afternoon?
5. Have you checked your medications to ensure you aren't taking something that is disrupting your sleep?
6. Are you avoiding coffee and alcohol in the evenings?
7. Are you only eating bedtime snacks that encourage sleepiness, and staying away from spicy foods?
8. Are you taking the time to clear your mind or do some mindfulness meditation before bed?



CONCLUSION

Sleep deprivation is no fun, and when you're not sleeping properly, it can affect your work, your health, and your relationships.

If your sleep patterns are disrupted for any reason, and you have tried unsuccessfully to remedy the situation using any of the above methods, then feel free to take our complimentary 60 second sleep assessment. After completing the questionnaire, you'll have a much better idea of what could be causing your sleeplessness.

Don't let lack of quality sleep hold you back from enjoying a productive life. A good night's sleep is essential to everybody, and we hope that these tips can help you rest well from now on.

Take Our Free Online Sleep Assessment

TAKE THE QUIZ TODAY >

CONTACT US >

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