

# Sleep Tips

**1. Set an alarm to go to bed.** If you find yourself consistently wishing you had hit the hay earlier but staying on track with a calming bedtime routine is virtually impossible for you, consider setting yourself an alarm -- to *go* to bed.

**2. Resist the urge to snooze.** Sleep caught between soundings of that alarm is just not high-quality sleep. The snooze button often disturbs REM sleep, which can make us feel groggy than when we wake up during other stages of sleep. You don't have to launch out of bed in the morning, but setting the alarm for a slightly later time and skipping a snooze cycle or two could bring big benefits.

**3. Go easy on the alcohol before bed.** While that nightcap really can make it feel easier to *fall* asleep, when your buzz wears off later in the night, you're more likely to wake up frequently.

**4. Slip on some socks.** Some people have the unlucky lot in life of colder-than-comfortable extremities. But having *warm* hands and feet seems to predict how quickly you'll fall asleep, according to a 1999 study. Speed up the process by pulling on a pair of clean socks before climbing into bed.

**5. Keep your bedroom dark.** Even the most inconspicuous glow -- like that from a digital alarm clock -- can disrupt your shut-eye. If you can't seal up all the light sources in your room, consider using a comfy eye-mask.

**6. Keep it cool.** Temperature in the bedroom is a little bit of a Goldilocks situation: A room that's too hot and a room that's too cold can both mess with your sleep. Try to keep your bedroom temperature just right, usually somewhere between 68-70 degrees.

**7. Power down an hour before bed.** Dim the lights and turn off all your devices -- smartphones, laptops, TVs, all of which belong *outside* the bedroom -- about 60 minutes before bedtime. Bright light is one of the biggest triggers to our brains that it's time to be awake and alert, so start sending the opposite signal early.

**8. Cut caffeine by the afternoon.** Your afternoon jolt stays in your system longer than you might think. Experts recommended laying off the caffeine by early afternoon to guarantee it won't keep you up in bed later.

**9. Exercise regularly.**

In the National Sleep Foundation's 2013 Sleep In America survey, regular, vigorous exercisers reported getting the best sleep. The best news is that it doesn't take much: Adding even just a few minutes of physical activity to your day can make a difference in your rest.

**10. Just try not to do it *too* close to bedtime.**

Most of us don't exercise intensely enough to really rev ourselves up so much that we override the sleep-promoting benefits of regular workouts. However, especially in people with trouble sleeping, making sure your sweat sessions end at least a couple of hours before bedtime is generally a good idea.

**11. Avoid heavy meals when it's late.** Your body isn't meant to be digesting while you sleep, so a big meal too close to bedtime may keep you up at night. Protein is especially hard to digest, so if you *have* to eat late, opt for lighter fare.

**12. Paint your bedroom a tranquil color.** Maybe it's a relaxing blue or a warm yellow -- the exact shade doesn't matter so much as long as it calms you.

**13. Reserve the bed for sleep and sex only.** Reading in bed is a form of relaxation, right? Yes... and no. A page-turner, a mystery or any other book that demands your emotional and intellectual attention may be more distracting than relaxing. Opt for lighter reading before bed, and keep it to the couch or your favorite comfy chair.

**14. Keep your bedroom quiet.** Noises like whirring electronics or ticking watches can easily be left outside the bedroom. For snoring bed partners or blaring sirens outside your window that are slightly more difficult to avoid, try a handy pair of earplugs.

**15. But not *too* quiet.** When your sleep haven is so silent you could hear a pin drop, every occasional bump in the night becomes that much more evident and disruptive. You might want to consider a white noise machine if your bedroom verges on the too-quiet side of the spectrum.

**16. Ban furry friends from bed.** Every little purr or tail wag is likely to disrupt your sleep, no matter how much you two enjoy cuddling. Plus, the animal dander Fido and Fluffy bring with them into the bedroom can trigger reactions in people with allergies, further disrupting their slumber.

**17. Make sure your mattress fits.** Believe it or not, lots of tossing and turning may be less about you and more about what you're lying on. That's right: An uncomfortable mattress might be the source of your sleepless nights. Whether that's because it's lost its cushioning or because it's simply too small, it's important to recognize the signs that it's time to buy a new one. Expect to make a swap every five to 10 years, according to Consumer Reports.

**18. Nap -- wisely.** When done right, a little daytime snooze won't destroy your nighttime slumber, and can boost memory, alertness and job performance while you're at it. Just make sure you limit your nap to 30 minutes, max, and don't snooze too close to bedtime.

**19. Try separate blankets in a shared bed.** If your bed partner is constantly stealing all the covers or one of you sweats while the other shivers, it might be a good idea to try making the bed with separate sets of sheets. Use only one fitted sheet and then give each person their own flat sheet to use. If you're worried about how that will look, cover the top with a comforter.

**20. Keep a consistent sleep/wake schedule, even on weekends.** Sticking to your work-week sleep and wake schedule over the weekend sounds like torture to most of us, but it's actually a wise move where sleep is concerned. Staying up and sleeping in later than normal can shift your body's natural clock in the same way that cross-country travel does. This so-called social jet lag can make it extra difficult to fall asleep when Sunday night rolls around, making for even more unpleasant Monday mornings.

**21. Strike a pose, say a prayer.** Yoga, meditation, even prayer are all helpful tactics to coax your mind to wind down. These quiet activities may help you slow your breathing and heart rate and drift off sooner.

**22. Take deep breaths.** If the quiet reflection above isn't your style, some simple breathing exercises may do the trick. Breathing deeply mimics how your body feels when it's already relaxed, so after inhaling and exhaling for a few rounds, you just might find yourself feeling calmer. That's because deep breathing stimulates the body's naturally-calming parasympathetic system, NPR reported.

**23. Try aromatherapy.** The scent of lavender has noted benefits for sleep. A small 2005 study found that a sniff before bed led to more deep sleep. And a 2008 study found that lavender helped women with insomnia fall asleep more easily, the Wall Street Journal reported.

**24. Take a hot bath.** A cozy soak raises your body temperature slightly. Then, when you hop out, you'll cool down quickly, which mimics the natural drop in body temperature caused by the brain as it readies the body for sleep. A warm bath before bed seems to help people fall asleep more quickly, but also get better *quality* sleep, according to a small 1985 study.

**25. Experiment with progressive muscle relaxation.** This relaxation exercise involves tensing then relaxing the muscles throughout the body, directing your attention to each as you go. It can improve sleep quality *and* reduce fatigue.

**26. Write down what's bugging you.** If other relaxation tricks won't cut it, get literal with those racing thoughts and put them on paper in a worry journal you keep by your bedside. Clearing your mind of this mental clutter can help you drift off more smoothly.

**27. Get out of bed if you really can't sleep.** If all else fails, get out of bed. Continuing to lie there only stresses you out *more*, making it even more difficult to nod off. Experts recommend getting out of bed to do something else -- as long it's relaxing and doesn't involve bright light. Then, climb back into bed when you're really tired.

**28. Get some sunlight first thing in the morning.** There's nothing quite like bright light to trigger your brain to stay awake and alert. Getting some natural light -- you'll want to aim for about 15 minutes -- first thing in the morning can help night owls reset their biological clocks and ease into sleep a little earlier.

**29. Get checked for sleep apnea.** It's possible that your snoring could be a sign of sleep apnea, a potentially-harmful sleep condition in which people stop breathing for brief periods, sometimes as many as hundreds of times a night. Lifestyle changes like losing weight and avoiding alcohol may help people with sleep apnea too, but often, to get the best rest, additional treatment -- typically with a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine -- is required from a doctor.

**30. Try a new pillow.** Dust mites might just love your pillows even more than you do. In some people, the buildup of these critters can trigger allergic reactions that make it harder to sleep. Generally, pillows should be replaced every 12 to 18 months, WebMD reported. You'll also want to make sure you're sleeping with the *right* pillow. Stomach sleepers, for example, need very thin, flat pillows, and side sleepers need something a little firmer to fill the distance between their ear and shoulder.

**31. Don't stress about sleep.** We're certainly not saying to shrug off your shuteye like it doesn't matter, but don't stress yourself out about getting adequate time in bed, either. The more anxious you get about getting enough sleep, the more difficult it will be to actually get any.

**32. Avoid drinking too many liquids too close to bedtime.** Don't go dehydrating yourself, but consider cutting off your water supply a couple of hours before bed to save yourself middle-of-the-night trips to the loo.

**33. Quit smoking.** Nicotine, like caffeine, is a stimulant, and consequently could keep you up at night. Smokers are four times more likely to say they feel tired when they wake up than nonsmokers, according to a 2008 study. As if you really needed another reason to kick the habit.

**34. Consider therapy.** Maybe your sleep troubles are a little more serious and could use the insight of a professional. Cognitive behavioral therapy is considered the gold standard when it comes to treating insomnia, and usually involves meeting with a therapist for various sleep assessments, keeping a sleep journal and adjusting some of your bedtime habits.