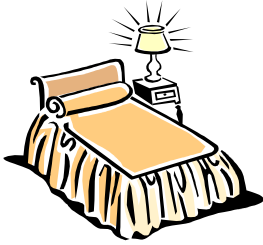


Tips For A Good Night's Sleep



If you have difficulty with your sleep for any reason, here are some tips that may help you get a better night's sleep:

1. Exercise regularly, but finish your workout at least three hours before bedtime. Exercise may relieve some PMS symptoms and increase the amount of deep sleep.
2. Avoid foods and drinks high in sugar (including honey and syrup), caffeine (coffee, colas, tea, chocolate), and alcohol before bedtime.

Caffeine and alcohol disturb sleep. Caffeine can also contribute to premenstrual bloating. Nicotine may make it difficult to fall asleep and lead to fragmented sleep. It can also put you at risk for cancer and heart disease. Avoid large meals and limit fluid intake before bed. Try a healthy snack so you are not too full or too hungry.

3. Try to have a standard relaxing bedtime routine and keep regular sleep times. Make sure your bedroom is dark, cool and quiet, and your pillows, sleep surface and coverings provide you with comfort.
4. For reducing PMS symptoms such as bloating, irritability and breast tenderness or other problems, consult your health-care professional.

Sleep Environment



Does that drip, drip, drip of the faucet keep you up at night? Do you need to keep your fan running because "white noise" helps you sleep? Have you ever tossed and turned because you were too hot or too cold? What about the barking dog or cat that jumps onto your bed – have they ever disrupted your zzz's? Most of us recognize that the sleep environment can greatly affect how (and if) we sleep, but are you doing everything you can to make your bedroom a sleep haven? Learn about the dos and don'ts of the sleep environment and then get tips for making your bedroom more sleep-friendly.

Noise

Did you know that noises at levels as low as 40 decibels or as high as 70 decibels generally keep us awake. That means that a dripping faucet can steal your sleep, as well as the next-door neighbor's blaring stereo. But the absence or presence of a familiar noise can have as great an impact on your sleep as out-of-the-ordinary noises – studies show that sirens and traffic noise from a city street can actually become soothing to longtime city sleepers (they will cringe at the thought of sleeping in the serene desert or mountain climate) just as the absence of the tick, tick, tick of your favorite clock while you try to sleep at a hotel can become a sleep stealer.



What to do – Try to block out unwanted sounds with earplugs or use "white noise" such as fan or an air conditioner. Take your favorite clock with you when you travel in order to recreate familiar sounds that help you sleep (as long as they won't keep your neighbors awake!)

Temperature

In most cases, temperatures above 75 degrees Fahrenheit and below 54 degrees Fahrenheit will disrupt sleep, but even sleep researchers fail to agree on the ideal temperature for sleep.

The point at which sleep is interrupted due to temperature or climate conditions varies from person to person and can be affected by bedclothes and bedding materials selected by the sleeper. In general, most sleep scientists believe that a slightly cool room contributes to good sleep. That's because it mimics what occurs inside the body when the body's internal temperature drops during the night to its lowest level. (For good sleepers, this occurs about four hours after they begin sleeping.)



What to do – In general, sleep scientists' recommend keeping your room slightly cool – but achieving the ideal temperature isn't always simple. What do you do if you and your partner disagree about room temperature? Turning the thermostat down at night in cold weather saves on fuel bills and sets the stage for sleep. Blankets, comforters or electric blankets can lock in heat without feeling too heavy or confining. Or the heat-seeking partner might dress in warmer bedclothes while the warmer partner might opt not to wear bedclothes or bed coverings. In summer, a room that's too hot can also be disruptive. In fact, research suggests that a hot sleeping environment leads to more wake time and lighter sleep during the night, while awakenings multiply. An air conditioner or fan can help, and a humidifier can provide relief if you're suffering from a sore throat or dryness in your nose.

Light

Much of our sleep patterns – feeling sleepy at night and awake during the day – are regulated by light and darkness. Light – strong light, like bright outdoor light (which is brighter than indoor light even on cloudy days) – is the most powerful regulator of our biological clock. The biological clock influences when we feel sleepy and when we feel alert. As a result, finding the balance of light and darkness exposure is important. Bright light helps to keep you awake during the day, but during sleep, bright lights can be disturbing.



What to do – Make sure to expose yourself to enough bright light during the day. Find time for sunlight, or purchase a lightbox or light visor to supplement your exposure to light. At bedtime, think dark: a dark bedroom contributes to better sleep. Try light-blocking curtains, drapes or an eye mask. If you find yourself waking earlier than you'd like, try increasing your exposure to bright light in the evening. It may delay sleep onset but as little as one to two hours of evening bright light exposure may help you sleep longer in the morning. Also, make sure to avoid light if you wake up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. Minimize light by using a low illumination night-light.

Sleeping Surface

For the most part, we know people sleep better when horizontal and not cramped by space. Not much research has been done to understand the sleeping surface, but it is clear that it plays a role in getting a good night's sleep. For example, tossing and turning on a lumpy 20-year-old mattress that doesn't provide support for your back or neck can impede you from getting the sleep you need and make you very sleepy (and stiff) the next day. Mattress experts say that too often consumers believe that ultra-firm mattresses are good for them. Research on patients with pack pain found this was not true and a more supple, comforting mattress may lead to better sleep.

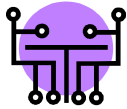
Also, know your pillow: research shows that pillows house thousands of fungal spores, which can trigger allergies and compromise a weakened immune system. The research shows that synthetic pillows held a greater amount of bacteria than feather pillows – one study found that synthetic pillows had as much as five times more dust-mite fecal matter than feather pillows (feather pillows have a thick casing to keep feathers in). So, not only can a pillow affect your posture and quality of sleep, it can also affect your allergies or asthma and make it very difficult to get a good night's rest.



What to do – Give yourself enough space to sleep. If you share a bed with a partner, make sure it is large enough to give both of you room to move around. Replace an old mattress with a new one, and choose a pillow and mattress that fits you best (soft, firm, thick, thin?) and will be comfortable throughout the whole night. *Consumer Reports* found that consumers who spent 15 minutes or more testing each mattress at the store were more likely to be happy with their purchase. Also, consider encasing your pillow in a plastic cover under your pillowcase to keep dust-mites from interfering with your sleep and allergy or asthma symptoms.

Other Factors

❖ Bed partners with sleep disorders can negatively impact your sleep. Have you ever been kept awake by your partner's snoring? Or been jolted out of a sound sleep by your partner's restless movements? If so, you're not alone. According to NSF's 2005 *Sleep in America* poll, 67% of respondents reported that their partner snores, 27% said their intimate relationship was affected because they were too sleepy, and 38% said they have had problems in their relationship due to their partner's sleep disorder.



What to do - Start off by talking to your partner about the problem. If he or she has not sought treatment for a potential sleep disorder, encourage them to see a doctor. Consider an earplug if snoring prevents your sleep. Try to create a sleeping arrangement that is comfortable for both you and your partner. Keep the lines of communication open.

❖ TVs, computers, and work in the bedroom are sleep-stealing culprits. NSF's 2005 *Sleep in America* poll found that 87% of respondents watched TV within an hour of going to bed at least a few nights a week. Doing work, watching TV and using the computer, both close to bedtime and especially in the bedroom, hinders quality sleep. Violent shows, news reports and stories before bedtime can be agitating. The sleep environment should be used only for sleep and sex.



What to do – Avoid highly engaging activities such as watching dramatic TV or doing work close to bedtime. Keep the TV and computer out of your bedroom! Make your bedroom a place that is centered on sleep.

❖ Pets can be cuddly in bed, but they may be interfering with your sleep. Anyone who has slept with another person in his or her bed knows that sharing a sleeping space can be disruptive, but when your four-legged friend gets added to the mix, it becomes even more complicated! While a pet can make your sleep environment more comfortable, it is not mindful of whether it is interfering with your sleep.



What to do – Think about providing your dog or cat with a bed in your bedroom, instead of sharing your bed. Well-rested pet owners will have more energy and love to give to their pets!