

Guide to Better Sleep

Why Sleep Matters

Sleep is vitally important for overall health and well-being. It helps with memory, mood, concentration, healing, and energy levels. Poor sleep can contribute to anxiety, depression, weakened immunity, and long-term health problems like heart disease and diabetes.

Many people think sleep should just “happen,” but **good sleep is a learned habit, not a magic trick**. If you’ve been struggling with sleep, change won’t happen overnight. Your body and brain need **time to adjust** to new sleep habits. It’s important to **try any new strategy for at least a couple of weeks** before deciding whether it works for you. If something doesn’t help, **tweak it, mix and match different ideas, and find what works best for your body**.

Your daytime and nighttime habits **directly impact your sleep**, and small changes can make a big difference. Everyone is different—**find what works for you and do more of it!**

GENERAL TIPS

- ♦ **Be consistent** – Your body thrives on routine. It takes **time** to reprogram your sleep.
- ♦ **Set a fixed bedtime and wake-up time** – Even on weekends and holidays. If you need to shift your schedule, do it gradually over a few weeks.
- ♦ **Prioritize sleep** – Don’t let work, social life, or screen time take over. Sleep is as important as eating and exercise.
- ♦ **Avoid overstimulation before bed** – Arguments, stressful conversations, heavy or spicy foods, and intense mental activities can make it harder to wind down. Aim for **calm and quiet** in the evening.
- ♦ **Avoid long or late naps** – If you’re struggling to sleep at night, skipping naps may help.
- ♦ **Limit stimulants** – Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, especially in the evening.
- ♦ **Check for medical conditions** – Sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, or anxiety can affect sleep. Talk to your doctor if sleep issues persist.
- ♦ **Eat well and stay hydrated** – A balanced diet and hydration support better sleep.
- ♦ **Recognize overtiredness** – Sometimes, when we’re **too tired**, our brain craves stimulation to stay awake. Be curious—are you scrolling because you’re **actually tired**?



Guide to Better Sleep

CUEING YOUR MIND AND BODY FOR SLEEP

💡 **Dim the lights** in the evening to signal to your brain that bedtime is approaching.

📴 **Power down electronics** at least 1-2 hours before bed—blue light from screens blocks melatonin, making it harder to sleep.

🛁 **Take a warm bath** – This helps cool down your body temperature, making you feel sleepy.

🧘 **Try relaxation techniques** – Meditation, mindfulness, deep breathing, or gentle yoga can help.

☕ **Drink nighttime tea** – Herbal teas like chamomile, valerian root, and passionflower can promote relaxation.

🌿 **Use calming scents** – Lavender, chamomile, bergamot, clary sage, valerian, sandalwood, ylang-ylang, jasmine, and frankincense can help the body relax before sleep.

CREATING A SLEEP-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT (Setting the stage)

Your bedroom should be a **haven for rest**.

🛏 **Comfort is key** – A **quality mattress, pillows, and breathable bedding** help your body relax. Adjust your blankets seasonally if you tend to overheat or get too cold.

🌡 **Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet** – A temperature of **60-67°F (15-19°C)** is ideal. Use blackout curtains, a fan, or a white noise machine if needed.

🚫 **Remove distractions** – Electronics, bright lights, or noisy environments can disrupt sleep.

🎧 **Use background noise** – White noise machines, calming music, or sleep apps can block out disruptions.

📖 **Bed = Sleep** – Avoid using your bed for work, scrolling, or watching TV. If you read, do so **outside of bed** and only get in when sleepy.


✅ **Stimulus cues matter** – Your bed should be for **sleep and intimacy only**. Avoid watching TV, scrolling, or working in bed. If you like to read before sleep, **do it in a separate chair or space**, then move to bed when sleepy.





Guide to Better Sleep

MANAGING A RESTLESS NERVOUS SYSTEM


Sometimes, sleep struggles are linked to stress or a fight-or-flight response. Here's how to help your body feel safe and relaxed:

 **Use deep pressure for comfort** – Weighted blankets, heavy bedding, or even sleeping under multiple layers can ground your body and signal relaxation.


 **Try gentle compression** – Wearing snug, soft clothing (like leggings, a fitted T-shirt, or compression socks) can create a soothing, secure feeling that helps the nervous system settle.


 **Create a bedtime safety ritual** – If your body feels unsafe at night, build a routine that reassures you:


- **Tell yourself you're safe** (e.g., "Right now, in this moment, I am okay.")
- **Use a calming scent** (lavender, sandalwood, or chamomile can help signal safety).
- **Gently tap your arms or legs** (bilateral stimulation can help settle the nervous system).

 **Help your body feel "held"** – If you feel restless in bed, try:


- Sleeping with a pillow against your stomach or back for added security.
- **Tucking yourself in snugly** (wrapping a blanket around your shoulders or legs).

 **Talk to your "on" mode** – If your brain won't stop racing, acknowledge it instead of fighting it:

 "Thank you for keeping me safe. I don't need you to shut off, just step back for a few hours. If something important happens, you can wake me."

 **Use gentle movement to downshift the nervous system** – If you feel too wired to sleep, try:

- **Slow rocking or swaying** (like gently rolling side to side while lying down).
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** – Tense and release each muscle group, starting from your toes up to your head.
- **Breathwork for safety** – Try box breathing (inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4).

 **If your body needs distraction, give it something gentle** – Some people need a calming sensory input before sleep, such as:

- **Listening to soft, predictable sounds** (a familiar audiobook, white noise, or sleep stories).
- **Holding something grounding** (a soft object, a textured fabric, or even a warm water bottle).



Guide to Better Sleep

- **Focusing on a slow, rhythmic activity** (tracing the outline of your hand, counting breaths).

🌙 The Goal:

You're not trying to force sleep—you're helping your nervous system feel safe enough to let sleep happen. Be patient, experiment with these tools, and see what works best for your body.

FALLING ASLEEP FASTER

If your mind races at night, try distraction techniques and relaxation techniques to ease into sleep.

◆ **Guided Imagery** – Imagine yourself walking through a peaceful, familiar place (e.g., an old family home or a garden). Engage all five senses—what do you see, hear, smell, and feel? The more detail, the better.

➡ **Use Sleep Apps** – Apps like Calm, Headspace, and Insight Timer offer guided meditations, sleep stories, and relaxing sounds to help quiet your mind.

🎧 **Listen to an Audiobook or Podcast** – Choose a familiar book or show that doesn't require active engagement. Set a timer so it shuts off automatically.

🫁 **Deep Breathing Exercises** – Slow, controlled breathing helps activate your body's relaxation response:


- **4-7-8 Breathing** – Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale slowly for 8 seconds. Repeat several times.
- **Counting breaths** – Count backward or forward while breathing slowly. If you lose track, just start again—no stress!
- **Breathing in, Breathing out** – Silently say “breathing in” on the inhale, “breathing out” on the exhale, or focus on the rise and fall of your chest.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** – Tense and release each muscle group from head to toe while breathing deeply.
- **Body scan breathing** – With each breath, imagine your body getting heavier or lighter.
- **Heavy to Light Breathing** – Take 20 slow breaths, imagining your body getting heavier with each inhale. Then, take 20 more slow breaths, imagining yourself getting lighter with each exhale.

🔠 **Alphabet Countdown** – Occupy your mind with this simple mental trick:


- Pick a theme (e.g., foods, animals, names) or just move through the alphabet.
- Start with A (e.g., "apple"), then count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
- Move to B ("banana"), count again, and continue through the alphabet.
- The repetitive pattern helps gently tire the brain without stress.



Guide to Better Sleep

 **Eye Movement Relaxation** – Certain eye movements can calm the nervous system and promote sleep:

- **Up and Down Movements** – Close your eyes and slowly move them up and down.
- **Side to Side Movements** – Move them left to right.
- **Circle Your Eyes** – Slowly roll your eyes circularly clockwise, then counterclockwise to release tension.
- **Repeat**


 **The Goal:** You're not trying to force sleep—you're gently distracting and relaxing your mind so sleep can happen naturally. Try these techniques consistently and see what works best for you!

FOOD & DRINK FOR BETTER SLEEP

What you eat can either help or hurt your sleep.

 **Avoid before bed:**

- **Caffeine** (coffee, tea, chocolate, energy drinks) at least 6 hours before bedtime.
- **Alcohol** – It may make you drowsy, but it disrupts deep sleep.
- **Heavy, spicy, or greasy foods** – Can cause discomfort and digestion issues.


 **Helpful sleep foods:**

- **Tryptophan-rich foods** – Turkey, bananas, almonds, and dairy can promote sleepiness.
- **Magnesium-rich foods** – Leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and whole grains help relax muscles.
- **Herbal teas** – Chamomile, valerian root, and passionflower may calm the nervous system.

MOVEMENT & NATURAL LIGHT

Your body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) is heavily influenced by movement and light.

 **Get natural light early in the day** – Spend time outside within an hour of waking.

 **Move your body regularly** – Exercise helps sleep, but avoid high-intensity workouts too close to bedtime.



Guide to Better Sleep

UNDERSTANDING SLEEP HORMONES

- **Melatonin (The Sleep Hormone)** – Released in response to darkness, melatonin signals your body that it's time to wind down.
 - Levels rise as the sun sets, promoting drowsiness.
 - Exposure to artificial light (screens, bright bulbs) can suppress melatonin production, making it harder to fall asleep.
- **Cortisol (The Wake-Up Hormone)** – Follows a natural cycle called the circadian rhythm.
 - Cortisol levels are lowest in the evening and rise in the early morning to help you wake up feeling alert.
 - Chronic stress or irregular sleep schedules can cause cortisol spikes at the wrong times, leading to sleep disturbances.
- **Other Hormones Affecting Sleep:**
 - **Adenosine** – Builds up throughout the day, creating sleep pressure that helps you feel tired at night.
 - **Serotonin** – A precursor to melatonin, helping regulate mood and sleep.
 - **Ghrelin & Leptin** – Influence hunger levels, which can impact nighttime wake-ups if unbalanced. Melatonin, often called the sleep hormone, is released in response to darkness, signalling to your body that it's time to wind down. As the sun sets and light exposure decreases, melatonin levels rise, promoting drowsiness and preparing your body for sleep. In contrast, stress hormones such as cortisol follow a natural cycle known as the circadian rhythm. Cortisol levels are typically at their lowest in the evening and gradually increase in the early morning hours, helping to wake you up and feel alert for the day ahead. However, high-stress levels or inconsistent sleep schedules can disrupt this balance, causing cortisol to spike at the wrong times and interfering with sleep quality.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR BETTER SLEEP

WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN'T FALL ASLEEP

If you're **tossing and turning for more than 20 minutes**, don't force it—get up and try something relaxing:

- Read a book (in dim light)
- Stretch or do light yoga
- Practice deep breathing or progressive relaxation
- Write down your thoughts to clear your mind

Mind Trick: Picture your worries in a “bubble” outside your room. Tell yourself you can pick them up in the morning (or pop the bubble!).



Guide to Better Sleep

Sleep Expectations

- Not Every Night Will Be Perfect – Everyone has rough nights sometimes! The goal is better sleep overall, not perfection. If you have a bad night, don't stress—just return to your sleep routine the next day.

Adjusting Time in Bed (For Insomnia)

- Time in Bed Matters – If you're lying awake for hours every night, try spending less time in bed at first. Only go to bed when sleepy, and if you wake up and can't fall back asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something calm in dim light before trying again.

Role of Temperature Cycles

- Control Your Body Temperature for Better Sleep – A warm bath or shower 1-2 hours before bed helps cool your core temperature.

Addressing Night Wakings

- Waking Up at Night? Don't Panic. Waking up briefly is normal. Instead of stressing, stay calm and focus on slow breathing.
- **Mindfulness Strategy: Leaves on a Stream**
 - Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit or lie down.
 - Close your eyes and imagine a gently flowing stream.
 - Picture leaves floating on the water, drifting past you.
 - As thoughts arise, visualize placing each one onto a leaf.
 - Watch the leaf and thought float away, without trying to hold onto it or push it away.
 - If you get caught up in a thought, gently return to watching the leaves.
 - Continue this process for a few minutes, allowing your mind to slow down and detach from racing thoughts. – This technique helps manage racing thoughts by promoting cognitive detachment. If you wake up with a busy mind, try visualizing a gently flowing stream with leaves drifting by. Place each thought, worry, or sensation onto a leaf and watch it float downstream. This practice helps you observe thoughts without getting caught up in them, making it easier to return to sleep.
- If you wake up and can't fall back asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something relaxing in dim light, such as reading a book, stretching, or listening to calming music.
- Avoid screens, bright lights, or checking the time, as these can stimulate your brain and make falling back asleep harder.
- Engage in a relaxation technique, such as progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or visualization.



Guide to Better Sleep

- If anxious thoughts are keeping you awake, try writing them down in a journal to clear your mind.
- Ensure your sleep environment is comfortable—adjust your blankets, check the room temperature, and eliminate noise disruptions if necessary.
- If waking up at the same time every night is a pattern, assess your caffeine intake, hydration, stress levels, and bedtime routine to identify potential triggers.

WHERE TO START GUIDE

Not Sure Where to Start? Try This:

- Step 1: Pick a set bedtime & wake-up time and stick to it for a week.
- Step 2: Stop screens 1-2 hours before bed and dim the lights.
- Step 3: Try a relaxation technique before bed.
- Step 4: Adjust your sleep space – Is your room cool, dark, and comfortable?

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If sleep problems **persist despite trying these tips**, a sleep specialist or doctor may help. You may have an underlying condition such as:

- **Insomnia** (trouble falling/staying asleep for weeks or months)
- **Sleep apnea** (pauses in breathing during sleep)
- **Restless leg syndrome** (uncontrollable urge to move legs at night)

Getting help **sooner** can prevent long-term sleep and health problems.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Getting better sleep takes time and consistency. Try different strategies, track what works, and **be patient with yourself**.

🌙 **Sleep is not a luxury—it's a foundation for good health. Make it a priority!**

✨ Sweet dreams! ✨