

HOW TO SLEEP WELL

There are very few things that are as frustrating as not sleeping well. This is especially problematic when it goes on for a long time. It is also hard to imagine that a few simple changes could make a difference, but this has been well studied and these simple changes are more effective than the medicines that are used to help people sleep.

It is generally one or more of four areas that are causing your problems:

- Your Sleep Environment
- Your Pre-Sleep and Sleep Habits
- Your Body
- Your Thoughts and Emotions.

These clearly overlap and so addressing more than one area is best.

Your Sleep Environment

Make your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable

This is where you can make a huge difference!

- **Too Hot or Too Cold:** A hot room can be uncomfortable. A cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm is recommended.
- **Too Noisy:** If noise bothers you, wear earplugs or get a "white noise" machine. Calming CD's can also be great!
- **Too Light:** If light in the early morning bothers you, get a blackout shade or wear a slumber mask
- **Mattress too firm or too soft:** sometimes purchasing a topper for your mattress can make a huge difference or sticking a firm piece of plywood under it.
- **Too Hectic:** the first thing is to get the TV out of your room and any other piles of too do's. Clear the clutter. Keep pets out too.
- **Turn your clock away from your bed.** This can be very helpful for clock watchers.

Your Pre-Sleep and Sleep Habits

Many people don't realize it, but they get revved up, just when they need to start winding down.

- **Ride your tired wave out.**
For most people this feeling comes in between 9 and 10pm, if you push past it you are often up until after midnight.
- **Sleep only when sleepy**
This limits the time you are awake in bed.
- **If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something boring until you feel sleepy**
Remember this is a great time to do stress management exercises. Sit quietly in the dark, do your relaxation techniques, or read the warranty on your refrigerator (not trilling novel). Do

not expose yourself to bright light while you are up, don't turn on TV or use the computer. The light gives cues to your brain that it is time to wake up.

- **Don't take naps**
This will ensure you are tired at bedtime. If you just can't make it through the day without a nap, sleep less than one hour, before 3 pm.
- **Get up and go to bed the same time every day**
Even on weekends! When your sleep cycle has a regular rhythm, you will feel better.
- **Develop sleep rituals and routines**
It is important to give your body cues that it is time to slow down and sleep. Listen to relaxing music, use lavender oils, read something soothing for 15 minutes, have a cup of caffeine free tea, do relaxation breathing exercises.
- **Only use your bed for sleeping**
Refrain from using your bed to watch TV, pay bills, do work or reading...So when you go to bed your body knows it is time to sleep. Sex is the only exception.

Your Body

- **Exercise regularly during the day**
Regular exercise is recommended to help you sleep well, but the timing of the workout is important. Exercising in the morning or early afternoon will not interfere with sleep.
- **Stay away from caffeine, nicotine and alcohol at least 6 hours before bed**
Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Coffee, tea, cola, cocoa, chocolate and some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine. Tobacco products contain nicotine. Alcohol may seem to help you sleep in the beginning as it slows brain activity, but you will end up having worse sleep.
- **Have a light snack before bed**
If your stomach is too empty, that can interfere with sleep. However, if you eat a heavy meal before bedtime, that can interfere as well. Dairy products, bananas, nuts, turkey contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer. Tryptophan is probably why a warm glass of milk is sometimes recommended.
- **Take a hot bath 90 minutes before bedtime**
A hot bath will raise your body temperature, but it is the *drop* in body temperature that may leave you feeling sleepy.
- **Use sunlight to set your biological clock**
As soon as you get up in the morning, go outside and turn your face to the sun for 15 minutes. Bright light during the day helps your body produce melatonin (sleep hormone).
- **Avoid screens before bed**
Using a tablet device for 2 hours before bed can completely stop your body secreting melatonin, a natural sleep aid.
- **Stop drinking liquids 4 or more hours before lying down for bed.**
This is mainly if you have to get up often to use the restroom.
- **Take Care of Your Feet:** some people like to rub oil or lotion on their feet before they go to bed, some like to wear socks, others like to make sure the sheets are loose on their feet.

Your Thoughts and Emotions

The most common reason I hear for sleep issues is, “my mind won’t turn off. My thoughts are racing.”

There are very simple techniques to work with to help your mind slow down.

- **Relaxation Response:**

Try the following 6-step relaxation response adapted from the book called “*The Relaxation Response*,” by Dr. Herbert Benson the next time you feel anxiety, stress, or have trouble sleeping:

Have you ever been in an airplane when it is raining or overcast, when you get up above the clouds it is sunny. In this exercise your thoughts are the clouds and your focus is the plane, you use your breath and a word to rise above the clouds.

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all of your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep your muscles relaxed. Focus on your chest/heart area or the area between your eyebrows. Imagine a warmth there.
4. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing.
5. As you breathe out (exhale), say the word, “ONE” or “SUN”, silently to yourself. For example: breathe IN...OUT, “ONE/SUN”, -IN...OUT, “ONE/SUN”, etc. Breathe easily and naturally. Do not worry about if you are successful in achieving a deep state of relaxation. When distracted, simply return to repeating “ONE” or “SUN.” Continue for 10 to 20 minutes or until you drift off to sleep. You can also use this technique a few times each day, especially during or after a long-hard day. It’s simple, fast and most importantly, it works!

- **Breath Counting:**

- **4/7/8 Breath:** count to 4 on the inhale, hold breath gently for count of 7 and exhale gently for the count of 8. Practice and find a natural pace and rhythm.
- **Count your inhale and exhale:** breathe deeply in through your nose for five or so seconds, then exhale through your mouth for five or so seconds. Repeat until feeling relaxed.

- **Write it down:** Keeping a pen and paper by your bed and write down any to do’s or great things you are afraid you will forget.
- **Move Your Emotions:** If you have some challenging feelings it is often best to get them off your plate before lying down by journaling, doing art work, talking to an understanding friend or finding a way to move them out of your mind and body.

Sleep Aids

Natural

Mild: (a good place to start)

- **Tea: Chamomile, Passion Flower, Hops, Chinese Skullcap, Lemon Balm:**
 - **Can usually be found in 'sleepy time' or 'bedtime' tea**
- **Magnesium: 250-500mg at bedtime**

Stronger:

I generally recommend to **ask your doctor before starting and then** start with what ever one makes the most sense for you. In general, most start with **Theanine**, and then add **Glycine** if more is needed.

- **With mild anxiousness or tension:**
 - **Theanine 200 mg at night.** Can also use during the day for mild anxiety at doses of 100.
 - **GABA 500-750mg** often with B6, helps many people to relax and many report help with sleep.
 - **Can also try Valerian or Kava Kava**
- **Waking at 3-4 am**
 - **5HTP 50-150mg** can use if waking at 3-4am is common. Check with your doctor if you are taking antidepressant medication.
- **Trouble returning to sleep**
 - **Glycine 2000 to 4000 mg at bedtime.** Can also help in returning to sleep later in the night without the side effect of daytime grogginess.
- **Shift workers or travelers**
 - **Melatonin 0.3mg-6mg 30 minutes to 1hr before bed.** This is a natural hormone. Use the lowest effective dose. Best for shift workers or jet lag to restore timing of sleep.

Pharmaceutical Sleep Aids (need prescription)

- **Trazodone 50 mg or more** – likely to cause dry mouth, can cause some people difficulty with urinating, but not likely. Not habit-forming, can be very helpful especially if mildly depressed.