



Stop Stressing, Start Sleeping

Tips for getting a better night's sleep

Sleep and stress have a complex relationship—stress can cause lack of sleep, but it's also true that poor sleep can elevate stress. In these tough economic times we've all got plenty of things to stress about, and sleeping shouldn't be one of them. Here are simple things you can do to help take the stress out of sleeping.

Create a sleep sanctuary: Your bedroom should be a soothing space, conducive to relaxation and indulgent comfort.

- Commit to getting seven to eight hours of sleep a night and keep a consistent sleep-wake schedule.
- Keep the room dark, quiet, comfortable, cool and clutter-free—keeping work materials, computers and televisions out of the bedroom.
- Choose the right mattress for your needs—a quality, comfortable, supportive and correct-sized mattress is key to healthy sleep. For example, two people sharing a bed should select a queen or king-sized mattress that allows room to move easily.
- Evaluate your mattress regularly—experts recommend that you evaluate and consider replacing your mattress every five to seven years, sooner if the mattress shows signs of wear, such as lumps or sagging.
- Use relaxing scents, such as essential oils, air fresheners, or unlit scented candles in aromas such as lavender, lemon balm, chamomile or vanilla, to create a calming environment.
- Paint your walls in calming colors, like neutral hues, muted tones or light pastels, to help you wind down; reserve bright colors for accents or bedding accessories.

Supplement your sleep: Vitamins and other dietary supplements are good for your overall well-being. According to CRN, certain supplements may help promote healthy sleep patterns. Before taking any supplements, be sure to consult your healthcare professional and always follow label directions. You and your doctor may consider the following supplements to help your quality of sleep:

- Melatonin—a natural hormone produced in the brain—helps regulate the human biological clock. Taken one to two hours before bedtime, it can help people who have a hard time sleeping.
- Valerian—an herbal supplement that has long been used as a natural sedative—may help you deal with stress more effectively, sleep more restfully and transition to sleep more easily.
- 5-HTP—also known as 5-Hydroxytryptophan—is an amino acid that helps the body make serotonin and tryptophan and has been shown to improve the duration and depth of sleep.
- Magnesium and calcium—minerals can help to relax tight muscles and keep muscle cramps at bay.

Sleep-proof your diet: When and what you eat can have a big impact on how well you sleep.

- Strive to consume a well-balanced, healthy diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins, throughout the day for overall good health.
- Avoid eating a large meal or consuming alcohol, nicotine and caffeine within two hours of bedtime and keep food out of the bedroom.
- Steer clear of eating heavy, spicy foods late in the day as they may cause heartburn and temporarily increase your metabolism.
- Try some protein, especially turkey, or dairy foods, both are good sources of tryptophan, an amino acid that is converted into melatonin and serotonin, which may naturally induce sleep.
- Eat a small pre-bedtime snack with a combination of complex carbohydrates and dairy, such as a small bowl of whole-grain cereal and low-fat or nonfat milk, to help you sleep.
- Drink a caffeine-free herbal tea, such as chamomile or lavender, before bed. Caffeine stimulates the nervous system. If you are experiencing sleep problems, limit caffeine consumption.
- Remember to take your daily multivitamin—most people don't eat as well as they should all of the time and a simple multivitamin can affordably and safely fill nutrition gaps in the diet and help promote good health.

Exercises for enhanced sleep: Engaging in one or more of these mind and body exercises may help improve your quality of sleep.

- Work out regularly—research shows that moderate aerobic exercises lasting 20 to 30 minutes four to five times a week will help you sleep better and give you more energy.
- Time is of the essence—exercising in the morning will energize you for the rest of the day. If you can't exercise in the morning, later in the day is fine as long as you avoid exercising at least two hours before bedtime.
- Try meditating or doing yoga—they're good ways to unwind and can help lower your heart rate and blood pressure, allowing you to doze off quicker and sleep more peacefully.
- Breathe deeply—it supplies extra oxygen to the muscles and relaxes the nervous system, which has a significant calming effect.
- Stop exercising your mind—read a book, listen to soothing music or soak in a hot bath to unwind and promote sleep. Limit forms of media and entertainment that may over-stimulate the mind before trying to fall asleep.

If you've tried some of these tips and you're still not getting the quality sleep that you need, consult your healthcare professional. Talk to your doctor about integrating these helpful tips with his or her recommendations. Here's to rejuvenating sleep and many sweet dreams!