

# TIPS & TRICKS FOR BETTER SLEEP

UNIVERSITY of NEBRASKA-LINCOLN EXTENSION

**1** This is #1 for a reason! **GET UP at the same time every day**, and try to keep your sleep schedule as regular as possible.

**2** Try **Sleep Restriction Therapy**: Keep track of sleep hours for one week to figure the average number of hours slept per night. Then allow only that number of hours in bed per night for one week, adding 15 minutes of sleep each week until you wake up before an alarm. This regulates your sleep cycle to prevent waking in the middle of the night!

## EXAMPLE OF HOURS SLEPT EACH DAY OF WEEK 1:

Monday = 6	Friday = 7
Tuesday = 5.25	Saturday = 8.25
Wednesday = 5.75	Sunday = 6.75
Thursday = 6.5	

Average hours per night = 6.5

**WEEK 2:** go to bed at 12, get up at 6:30

**WEEK 3:** go to bed at 11:45, get up at 6:30

**WEEK 4:** go to bed at 11:30, get up at 6:30, etc...

**3** Create **mental triggers** before bedtime like we do for children: have a warm bath, read a book, eat a light snack, put on pajamas, or create a to-do list for the next day so your head is clear of those things.

**4** Wear **non-restrictive clothing** or none at all. Anything that tangles around you when turning over in bed, pushes against your bladder, or creates too much heat must GO.

**5** Set nighttime **temperature at 60-68 degrees**. Bodies must cool down for good sleep. Vasodilation, or blood vessels dilating, carries heat to the skin in waking hours and then skin will cool down, signaling the brain that it is time to sleep.

**6** Persistently cold feet can interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Place a **hot water bottle, heating pad, or corn bag at your feet** under the covers if socks don't warm them enough.

**7** Focus on **sleep position**—spine aligned, arms and legs not bent much, no leg-stacking. Sleeping on your back is best unless you have sleep apnea. The left side is next best for digestion and waste elimination (keep spine aligned and arms not kinked), the right side is third best, and on your front is worst (it kinks the neck, flattens spine leading to back pain, and restricts your airway/breathing).

**8** Change **pillow or mattress plushness**—fat pillows are only good for propping up to read and nothing else; try a pillow between your legs for hip support.

**9** Once in bed, do a **body inventory**. Focus on one body part at a time from head to toes and relax each one. Remember the key and always come back to it... **Relax your jaw and remove tongue from the roof of your mouth**.

**10** **Talk to your physician** about a blood test to determine iron level, or discuss any current meds that may affect sleep. Sometimes just

taking medicine at a different time of day makes a difference. Melatonin is the “Dracula hormone” that regulates our sleep cycle. It might be helpful for shift work or jet lag, re-setting a sleep cycle. Always use temporarily and in low doses, as high doses mess with your body’s ability to produce melatonin on its own again later. Magnesium supplements may be another helpful option. Never become dependent upon sleeping pills. It is a last resort saved for rare occasions and usually has consequences.

11

**Get direct sunlight** or photo therapy light soon after you wake, and start dimming lights indoors at sunset or a couple hours before bedtime. As the eyes age, lenses yellow and pupils narrow, which make it difficult to collect light our bodies need. Talk to your physician about vitamin D3 if you’re not getting quality sunlight during the day. When your shadow is shorter than you, that time of day is best for needed light. Indoor lights are 1,000 to 10,000 times dimmer and at the wrong end of the spectrum for effectiveness. **Get outside!!!**

12

Lose weight that causes difficulty breathing to relieve stress on internal organs. In many cases, this means only 5 to 10 pounds for a significant difference. If you do nothing physical throughout awake time, your body has no reason to rest and you will most likely have sleep issues. Do an activity you enjoy, but quit a couple hours before bedtime so your body can cool down. **Add more activity to your day** while doing mundane things. When you find yourself sitting, **GET UP** and move at least every hour! Ideas: During television commercials, do leg lifts on the floor or stand and push up to toes and back several times. When driving, flex and point toes and do shoulder rolls. Try a stand-up desk if you sit all day.

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Be more mindful of what you put into your body. **Eat REAL food and drink lots of water** but quit a few hours before bedtime. Alcohol tends to wake you up in the middle of the night and contributes to snoring. Avoid it.

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Establish a **Caffeine Curfew**. Limit intake to mornings only and have less.

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Move electronics at least six feet from your bed, and have **no blue light** (or any light) in your room whatsoever, while in bed. If you must use your cell phone, set as: settings > display & brightness > night shift and “more warm” on a timer for every evening through early morning.

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Turn off all devices so there is **no dinging, vibrating, or lighting up** happening while you sleep. You can set your cell phone to ring only for selected calls under “Do Not Disturb” setting. Alarms do still work in airplane mode.

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Kick the **pets (or kids) out of bed!** Kicking your partner out of bed is also an option, but if there is significant snoring with paused breathing or gasping, see a physician to check for sleep apnea. Sleep apnea can be life threatening. The brain doesn’t get enough oxygen, and it leads to high blood pressure, diabetes, headaches, and heart problems. If you want to keep your bed partner and you’re sure the snoring is not sleep apnea, try soft ear plugs. Be sure to insert correctly.



**18** Use a **humidifier** next to bed during winter and keep it clean! Dry winter air is a major factor in sinus issues. Use a **fan** in the summer for air movement.

**19** Use a **non-lighted noise machine** or download a white noise app on your phone (remember to keep phone plugged in while using the app).

**20** Use the **bedroom for sleep and sex only**, not television or computers. Intimacy = sleep. Sleep = higher libido. It's a full circle of benefits!

**21** **STRETCH more** throughout the day and especially when you wake up. This pushes blood to your muscles and brain for more energy, better concentration, and help with injury prevention.

**22** Buddha described the human mind as being filled with drunken monkeys. They are jumping, chattering, and screeching continually, especially as we try to fall asleep. It is actually a version of an anxiety disorder. If Monkey Mind thoughts are keeping you awake, **try taking some time in the evening to process your day**. Sometimes processing it in bed becomes a habit that makes your subconscious regard sleep as a threat. If necessary, negotiate with your monkeys about worst-case scenarios (they are usually not life-or-death results), jot to-do notes if it helps, then go to bed and think happy thoughts, listen to an upbeat podcast, read a book, or concentrate on deep breathing and body part relaxation. Rather than fretting about not falling asleep, try thinking about staying awake. It may seem counterintuitive, but it can lower your anxiety level enough to relax. Don't force a bedtime if you are not sleepy. Your body must want to sleep.

**23** Try pleasant scents in your room (**aromatherapy**) like lavender, which is proven to promote relaxation. This can be in spray form or through a diffuser.

**24** In the winter, **preheat your bed** with an electric blanket or electric mattress pad, but turn it off when you get into bed. Again, vasodilation will lead to cooling of the body,

but that initial warmth in a chilly room is extremely relaxing.

**25** **Stop watching television** or using the computer at least an hour before going to bed. If you cannot break that habit, use a blue light-reducing screen or special blue-light reducing glasses. Or both!

**26** Use your alarm clock the **RIGHT way—no snooze button!** Get out on time. Similar to establishing constant sleep and wake times, it is about conditioning yourself over weeks, depending on how many times you hit the snooze button. By using snooze, you've just wasted 5, then 10, then 15 minutes of valuable sleep! Try different alarms that are more pleasant than an annoying beeping or buzzing. Place the alarm across the room if you are prone to going back to sleep.

**27** Try keeping a **waking/sleep diary** to keep track of habits and trends that are working. Keep this by your bed to easily record information. Even easier, wear a fitness tracker wristband that also records your sleeping and waking times. Compare to your activity levels, food/drink consumption, and other factors.

**28** Go to bed each night with a **sense of gratitude toward sleep**, not dread. Make your bedroom a sanctuary of quiet, clean, uncluttered, cool darkness that you appreciate.

**29** Use a **heavy blanket to tuck around yourself** like swaddling a baby. This "deep-touch therapy" promotes sleep when certain parts of the body feel touch or a heavy blanket. This can be a powerful tool for helping to relieve anxiety and to relax the nervous system.

**30** If you have chronic insomnia, a good treatment may be **cognitive behavioral therapy** (CBT), which would involve a licensed sleep therapist analyzing many of the items covered on this list to help you come up with a plan to best tackle your insomnia. In the 1970s, there were just a few sleep centers in the United States. Today there are thousands, with many now in small hospitals.

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