

Tips & Tricks for Better Sleep

- 1___ This is #1 for a reason! Go to bed at the same time and more importantly, **GET UP at the same time every day.**
- 2___ Try **Sleep Restriction Therapy**: Keep track of sleep hours for one week, find average number of hours slept per night. Start going to bed at a time that allows you only that number of hours of sleep and do that for one week, then add 15 minutes of sleep each week until you wake up before the alarm. It will take several weeks of dedication, but it works when consistent! (Ex: M=6, T=5.25, W=5.75, Th=6.5, F=7, S=8.25, Su=6.75; total 45.5) Avg. 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...
- 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, 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___ HOWEVER, cold feet can interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Place a **hot water bottle or heating pad 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. On your back is best unless you have sleep apnea, left side is next best for digestion and waste elimination (keep spine aligned and arms not kinked), 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:

Remove tongue from roof of 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. The kind we take orally is from animal sources (not a synthetic drug) and might be helpful for shift work and setting a sleep cycle—always in low doses, as high doses mess with your body’s ability to produce melatonin on its own again later. 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 between 6 AM and 8 AM, or soon after you wake if shift working, 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. Take 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.

13___ 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.

14___ Establish a **Caffeine Curfew**. Limit intake to mornings only and have less.

15___ Move electronics at least six feet from your bed, and have **no blue light** (or any light) in your room whatsoever. In hours leading up to bedtime, use a blue light filter for iPad or computer, and set cell phone as: *settings > display & brightness > night shift and “more warm”* on a timer for every evening.

16___ 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.

17___ Kick the **pets (or kids) out of bed!** Kicking the spouse 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 the "*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**. 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're absolutely 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 turn down the screen's brightness, at the very least.

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 five, then ten, 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 three sleep centers in the United States. Today there are more than 2,500 with many in Nebraska even at small hospitals. CBT can be an effective way to have a healthier, happier life, and may be covered by your health insurance plan.

Susan Harris-Broomfield

University of Nebraska Extension Educator – Rural Health, Wellness, and Safety

424 N Colorado, PO Box 31, Minden NE 68959-0031

Office 308.832.0645 | Cell 308.340.0856 | susan.harris@unl.edu

