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16 Chronological Tips to Improve Your Sleep

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1 in 3 U.S. Adults Don't Get Enough Sleep

In February 2016, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that one in three U.S. adults don't get enough sleep. In this case, "enough" sleep was defined as seven or more hours per night, but many adults may need closer to eight hours per night (and thus lack of sleep may affect even more than one in three adults). What are the health risks of this reported sleep deprivation? Research has found that when participants cut their sleep from 7.5 to 6.5 hours a night, there were increases in activity in genes associated with inflammation, immune excitability, diabetes, cancer risk, and stress. Poor or insufficient sleep was even found to be the strongest predictor for pain in adults over 50.6 Interrupted or impaired sleep can also:

- ❓ Increase your risk of heart disease and cancer; Increase your risk of dying from any cause
- ❓ Harm your brain by halting new neuron production. Sleep deprivation can increase levels of corticosterone (a stress hormone), resulting in fewer new brain cells being created in your hippocampus
- ❓ Contribute to a pre-diabetic, insulin-resistant state, making you feel hungry even if you've already eaten, which can lead to weight gain
- ❓ Contribute to premature aging by interfering with your growth hormone production, normally released by your pituitary gland during deep sleep (and during certain types of exercise, such as high-intensity interval training)

16 Chronological Daily Tips to Improve Your Sleep

1. Open Your Shades

Exposure to bright light first thing in the morning stops production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin and signals to your body that it's time to wake up. Outdoor sunlight is best, so you might even want to take a quick walk outside.

2. Make Your Bed

This is a psychological trick aimed at making your bedroom less cluttered — and therefore easier to relax in — come bedtime. You can also quickly put away any junk cluttering your nightstand and dresser.

3. Exercise

4. Take a Walk Outdoors After Lunch

Not only will this increase in physical activity help you sleep later, but taking your walk outdoors gives you more exposure to bright sunlight. Light intensity is measured in lux units, and on any given day, the outdoor lux units will be around 100,000 at noon. Indoors, the typical average is somewhere between 100 to 2,000 lux units — about two orders of magnitude less. The brightness of the light matters, because your pineal gland produces melatonin roughly in approximation to the contrast of bright sun exposure in the day and complete darkness at night. If you are in relative darkness all day long, it can't appreciate the difference and will not optimize your melatonin production. This, in turn, can have some rather significant ramifications for your health and sleep.

5. Cut Off Your Caffeine

6. Consider a Nap

The key is to avoid napping for too long! The ideal nap time for adults appears to be around 20 minutes.

7. Exercise in the Early Evening (If You Haven't Already)

The importance of exercise for sleep cannot be overstated, so if you didn't fit in your workout in the morning, be sure to do so later. One poll by the National Sleep Foundation found that 83 percent of people said they slept better when they exercised (even late at night) than when they did not, so even if it's late, you may still want to exercise. Let your body be your guide.

8. Take 15 Minutes to Unwind

If you're stressed, it's harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. Taking 15 minutes (at least) each day to relax may help your sleep significantly. You may try listening to music, journaling, meditation or chatting with a neighbor.

9. Eat a Light Dinner and Stop Eating Three Hours Before Bed

10. At Sundown, Dim Your Lights (or Use Amber-Colored Glasses)

In the evening (around 8 p.m.), you'll want to dim your lights and turn off electronic devices. Normally, your brain starts secreting melatonin between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m., and these devices emit light that may stifle that process. After sundown, shift to a low-wattage bulb with yellow, orange or red light if you need illumination.

11. Turn Down the Volume

In the evening hours, you'll also want to keep noise to a minimum. Noise louder than a normal conversation may stimulate your nervous system and keep you awake.

12. Take a Warm Bath About 1.5 Hours Before Bed

Thermoregulation — your body's heat distribution system — is strongly linked to sleep cycles. When you sleep, your body's internal temperature drops to its lowest level, generally about four hours after you fall asleep. Scientists believe a cooler bedroom may therefore be most conducive to sleep, since it mimics your body's natural temperature drop. This is also why taking a warm

bath 90 to 120 minutes before bedtime may help you sleep; it increases your core body temperature, and when it abruptly drops when you get out of the bath, it signals your body that you are ready for sleep.

13. Adjust Your Bedroom Temperature

While there's no set consensus as to what temperature will help you sleep the best, in most cases any temperature above 75 degrees Fahrenheit and below 54 degrees F will interfere with your sleep.¹⁰ Some experts suggest 65 degrees F is ideal for sleep.

14. Sip a Cup of Chamomile Tea

15. Get Ready for Bed

A nightly ritual of washing your face, brushing your teeth and getting into your pajamas signals to your mind and body that it's time for bed. Try to stick with the same hygiene ritual, at the same time, each night.

16. Sleep in Complete Darkness