

# 20 Tips to Beat Insomnia and Sleep Better

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## Back Off of Blue Light

Smart phones, e-readers, tablets, computer screens, TVs, and digital clocks emit blue light, a short frequency of light that may be harmful to the eyes and disrupt sleep. Minimize screen time for several hours before bedtime to get a good night's rest. Wearing orange tinted glasses that block out blue light may also be helpful. Apps are available for your computer, tablet, and smartphones that prevent the screens from emitting blue light. Besides blue light exposure, it makes sense to power down several hours before bedtime to maximize your chances of getting a good night's rest. Cover up any displays that may be visible from your bed, like a digital clock. Black out curtains can block out ambient light from outside.



## Nap If You Are Sleep-Deprived

Naps are a good way to get some extra rest if you are tired, but too long of a nap will make sleeping at night harder. The best naps are under 20 minutes. Any longer than that may interfere with nighttime rest. Short naps are proven to boost alertness, mood, and performance. Take a nap in a cool, dark room for maximum benefits. Avoid napping too late in the day as this can also negatively affect nighttime rest. Naps longer than 10 to 20 minutes are associated with sleep inertia which is grogginess and disorientation that occurs for a few minutes up to 30 minutes after waking up from deep rest.



## Clock-Watching Increases Anxiety

One of the worst things you can do if you're having trouble falling or staying asleep is to watch the clock. Watching the seconds, minutes, or hours tick by when you're wide awake may produce a lot of anxiety which will not help you sleep better. Avoid the temptation to watch the clock. Turn the clock around so you can't see the display. Instead, do something productive to pass the time and make you sleepy. Read a book, get up and do some light chores around the house, or have a cup of tea (decaf) or warm milk to help you fall asleep. Anything you can do to distract yourself and pass the time when you can't fall asleep is helpful.



## Use Pillows to Ease Low Back Pain

People who suffer from low back pain often have trouble sleeping. In one study, people who had acute or chronic low back pain reported equal problems with sleep quality. The level of pain was not associated with rest disturbance. If you're plagued with back pain, try sleeping on your side to reduce pressure on your lower back. Place a pillow between your knees to make sure your hips are in alignment to further reduce low back strain. Make sure your mattress is supportive enough and that it doesn't aggravate your back pain. When getting into and out of bed, swing both legs together and avoid bending at the waist to protect your back.



### **Keep Your Neck in a Neutral Position**

Neck pain is a common reason many people have trouble falling asleep. Maintaining proper posture can reduce the probability of neck pain and help you get better sleep. Make sure your neck is in a "neutral" position. That means your nose should line up with the center of your body. Get a pillow that is the right height to keep your neck in a neutral position. Too high and your neck will be bent too far forward. Too low and your neck will be bent too far backward. A feather or memory foam pillow that molds to the shape of your head and neck are good options. Try to avoid sleeping on your stomach. Your head is turned to the side in this position and twists your neck which may cause pain and put pressure on nerves.



### **Allergy-Proof Your Mattress and Blankets**

Allergies interfere with the ability to get enough sleep. Symptoms of allergies include sneezing, sniffing, and coughing. Many people with nasal stuffiness and allergies experience snoring. Maintain an allergen-free bedroom to keep allergies at bay. Dust mites are a common allergen found in bedding. To minimize exposure to dust mites, encase your mattress, box spring, and pillows in zippered dust-mite proof covers. Make sure the covers are hypoallergenic and made of microfiber to deter the growth of mold, mildew, and dust mites. Change bedding often, at least once per week and wash it in water that is at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit to kill dust mites. Keep pets out of the bedroom to minimize exposure to dog and cat fur and dander.



### **Use the Bed Only for Sleep and Sex**

If you have trouble sleeping, get up and do some light chores around the house or another activity until you feel tired. Do dishes or declutter a closet or drawer. You should only use your bedroom for sleep and sex. If you work, read, watch TV, or use the computer while in bed, you may be too stimulated to fall asleep. Keep the TV and computer out of the bedroom. You want your body and mind to associate the bedroom with sleep and relaxation. Another good tip is to keep the room cool to improve sleep quality.



### **Mind Your Circadian Rhythm**

Going to bed and waking up the same time every day, even on the weekends, can help you get good sleep. Maintaining a sleep schedule helps your body have a consistent sleep-wake cycle. Over time, this will help you get to sleep quickly and get deep sleep throughout the night. Another way to optimize your sleep patterns is to get adequate sunlight as soon as you get out of bed in the morning. Go outside without sun glasses and get 5 to 30 minutes of sun exposure to tell your brain to wake up. Early morning sun exposure also increases the production melatonin.



### **Watch Out for Hidden Caffeine**

Many people rely on morning coffee to stay awake, but caffeine consumption after noon may contribute to sleep problems. To maintain good sleep habits, avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening. Caffeine is found in many foods, beverages, and even certain medications. Some hidden sources of caffeine include chocolate, tea, some pain relievers, weight loss pills, soda, and energy drinks. You may need to experiment a bit. People have different abilities to metabolize caffeine. If you are very sensitive, you may even have to avoid decaf coffee which contains a small amount of the stimulant.



### **Exercise Improves Sleep Quality**

Regular physical activity reduces the risk of insomnia and helps you get a restful night's sleep. Studies have shown that getting as little as 10 minutes of aerobic activity per day is enough to significantly improve sleep quality. Cycling, running, and swimming are good options. To make exercise as conducive to sleep as possible, avoid working out within 3 to 4 hours of your bedtime. Mind-body exercises like yoga and tai chi are relaxing to do in the afternoon or evening. They are great for relieving stress and set the stage for you to get good deep sleep.



### **Smart Nighttime Snacks**

Eating certain foods in the evening may interfere with your ability to sleep at night. Foods that are heavy or very rich, fried, or spicy may trigger indigestion. Carbonated beverages and citrus fruit may also be triggers. Heartburn may keep you lying awake at night. Choose light, easily digestible snacks before bedtime like crackers and cheese, fruit, or cereal with milk that won't provoke uncomfortable symptoms. If heartburn is an issue, sleep slightly propped up to keep stomach acid where it belongs. Do not eat within an hour before bedtime to give yourself a bit of time to digest before turning in.



### **Alcohol Disturbs Sleep**

Alcohol is deceptive. Initially it may make you sleepy, but it is actually disruptive to sleep. Alcohol interferes with the sleep cycle and may cause you to wake up too early the next day. Drinking alcohol may make you wake up often at night. Alcohol blocks deep restorative rapid eye movement or, REM sleep. It relaxes your muscles, including those in your throat, so it increases the risk of sleep apnea and snoring. Choose a nightcap that won't dehydrate you and give you a headache the next day. Have a cup of chamomile tea or a glass of warm milk at night to promote relaxation and help you drift off.



### **Prevent Nighttime Bathroom Interruptions**

It is not good to be dehydrated but drinking too many fluids may lead to frequent nighttime urination which may interfere with your ability to get enough sleep. If you find yourself getting up to urinate frequently throughout the night, it may be a sign of a medical problem. See your doctor for an evaluation. Limiting fluid intake for at least a couple of hours before bedtime may help reduce or eliminated nighttime trips to the bathroom. Keep a nightlight in the hallway and bathroom so you can find your way easily without tripping and turning on the lights which may throw off your sleep schedule.



### **Turn Down the Lights to Get Better Sleep**

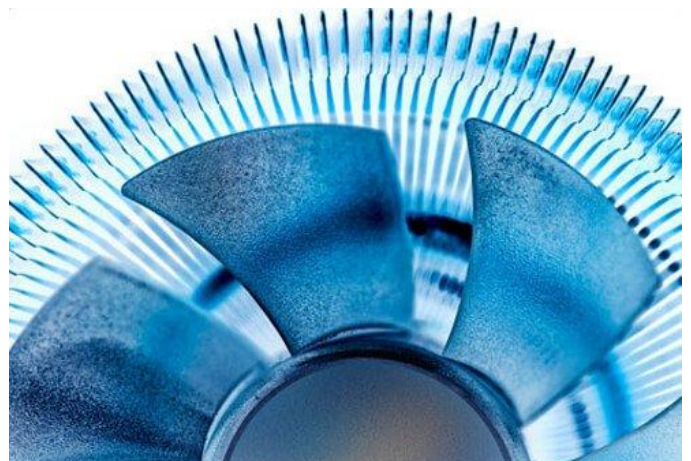
Bright indoor lights inhibit the production of melatonin, the hormone that helps you fall asleep. Put dimmer switches on indoor lights and lower the lighting level in your home for at least 2 to 3 hours before bedtime. If you like to read before bed, read by a light using a low wattage bulb to avoid being exposed to levels of light that will make it hard to fall asleep. Use heavy black out curtains on bedroom windows to keep light outside from sneaking in and wreaking havoc on your sleep schedule.



### **Keep Noise to a Minimum**

#### **Quiet Supports Healthy Sleep Patterns**

Keep the bedroom as quiet as possible to help you nod off at night. Some noise is unavoidable. Traffic outside, a barking dog, and dripping faucets can be distracting. Wear earplugs at night to drown out ambient noise. You can use a fan or a white noise machine to mask sounds. Fix leaky faucets, squeaking doors, and other noisy distractions around the house. Ask family members to keep the noise down after hours and respect your bedtime routine.



### **Avoid Tobacco for Better Sleep**

Nicotine has an effect on neurotransmitters, brain chemicals that influence mood and sleep. Nicotine is a stimulant and can make it hard to fall asleep and stay asleep. Studies have proven that nicotine increases insomnia, daytime sleepiness, and sleep problems. Nicotine use suppresses restorative REM sleep. Smoking increases sleep-related respiratory problems. See your doctor if you'd like to quit smoking. There are medications and nicotine-replacement products that can help you wean off slowly and quit. Don't be discouraged if you fall off the wagon. Many people try to quit a few times before they finally kick the nicotine habit for good. Many people are concerned about weight gain when they quit. Your doctor can advise you about diet and exercise strategies to combat that.



## Keep Pets Off the Bed

Many people sleep with pet cats or dogs on their bed, but pets may keep you from getting much sleep. If they wake up, move, or make noise at night, it may wake you up. If you're the kind of person who has a hard time falling asleep if you wake up at night, it makes more sense to keep pets out of the bedroom. There are other reasons to make your bedroom off limits to pets. If you have allergies or asthma, pet fur and dander could provoke your symptoms. Pets who go outdoors also track pollen into the house. You can teach your pet to sleep in his or her own bed in another room.



## Establish a Relaxing Nighttime Routine

It is an especially good idea to avoid stress and do relaxing activities in the evening. Do not work at night. Avoid emotionally upsetting conversations, scary movies, and thrilling novels. If you are a worrier, scribble your thoughts and feelings down in a journal to help get them off your mind. Wind down before bed by taking a warm bath, listening to relaxing music, meditating, or reading a soothing book. Meditating for as little as 10 minutes a day benefits both body and mind.



## Use Sleeping Pills with Caution

### What Are the Side Effects of Sleeping Pills?

Several prescription medications are available to help with sleep. Many of these drugs can be addictive and their use may be associated with side effects. Ideally, sleeping pills should be used on a short-term basis as directed by your doctor. Optimize your sleep schedule by practicing good sleep hygiene. Make appropriate diet, exercise, and lifestyle and behavioral changes to get better sleep. If you are experiencing sleep problems, your doctor may recommend you undergo a sleep study. Ask your doctor for sleep tips if you need help.



## See Your Doctor for Chronic Sleep Problems

Everyone suffers from occasional sleeplessness from time to time, but chronic sleep problems may be a sign of a more serious underlying problem. Certain medical conditions or medications may interfere with sleep. Lack of sleep can contribute to difficulty concentrating, memory problems, and an increased risk of accidents. See your doctor about your sleep problem. Be honest about any trouble you're having falling asleep or staying asleep. Let your doctor know if you wake up feeling unrefreshed or if you feel sleepy or even fall asleep during the day. Keep a diary of your symptoms so you and your doctor can notice any patterns that may be contributing to your condition.



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