

# SLEEP SAVVY

## 10 Steps to Put an End to Sleepless Nights

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Making simple lifestyle changes can make all the difference to the quality of your sleep.

### **Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.**

Aim to go to bed and wake up at the same time. This will help to set your body's internal clock to expect sleep at a certain time night after night. Try to stick as closely as possible to this routine, even at weekends to avoid a Monday morning sleep hangover.

### **Eliminate alcohol and stimulants such as nicotine and caffeine.**

Try to cut down on stimulants such as caffeine, tea, coffee and energy drinks or colas. Nicotine is also a stimulant & smokers often suffer from disrupted sleep. Stimulants interfere with the natural process of falling asleep and prevent you falling into a deep sleep. Avoid stimulating drinks especially in the evening. Instead, opt for a warm, milky drink or herbal tea.



### **Exercise regularly.**

Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise on a regular basis, such as swimming or walking can help relieve built-up tension. Avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime as this may keep you awake.

### **Limit naps.**

Nap early or not at all. Many people make naps a regular part of their day. However, in people who find going to sleep and staying asleep a problem, afternoon naps may be the culprit. Late-day naps decrease sleep drive. If you must nap, keep it before 5pm.



### **Limit activities in bed.**

It may seem harmless to knock out a few emails before bed or unwind with your favourite movie, but this is engaging your mind. The blue light emitted by screens

on mobile phones, computers, tablets and televisions limits the production of melatonin, the hormone that helps you relax and fall into a slumber. Following a day full of technology, your brain needs time to unwind. Aim to give yourself a minimum of 30 minutes of tech free time before hitting the hay. Better still, make your bedroom a tech free zone.



### **Don't eat or drink just before bedtime.**

Over indulging in heavy foods and alcohol close to bedtime can be a recipe for disaster for

those who struggle to fall asleep. Finish dinner several hours before bedtime and avoid foods likely to cause indigestion.



### **Make your sleeping environment comfortable.**

Your bedroom should be a peaceful place for rest and sleep. Minor adjustments to your sleep environment can yield big results. A lumpy mattress can give anyone nightmares. A quality mattress can last 10 years. Pillows should be changed at least every 18 months.

Whilst it might be tempting to turn up the heating at night to make your bedroom nice and cosy, it actually interferes with your body's natural thermostat as your body temperature fluctuates through the night. The ideal temperature for your bedroom is around 20 degrees celsius.



Avoid direct bright light exposure before bed as this has been shown to suppress melatonin, a hormone that provides the body's internal biological signal of darkness. Use blackout curtains if daylight or street lights shine through your window at night, and no phones or laptop screens should be used for an hour or two before bed time.

Whether you have a snoring partner or you live on a busy street, loud or sporadic noises disrupt your sleep. One solution might be to invest in a white noise machine. These devices create natural background noise.

### **Don't take worry to bed.**

Set aside time, possibly after dinner to review the day and to make plans for the next day. Discuss or write them in a notebook. This way you have set them aside out of your mind until the next day and you can focus your attention on relaxing prior to settling down to sleep.



### **Soak it up.**

Taking a relaxing bath or shower can help declutter the mind. Use a soothing bath essence which contains lavender, a natural sleep aid. As our body's temperature falls in from a warm bath or shower, our circadian rhythm is signalled to begin making us sleepier.

### **Clock watching.**

If you really can't sleep because your head is buzzing, don't just lie there watching the clock, get up! Leave the room and move to the living room under a dim light and do something you find relaxing until you feel sleepy again, then go back to bed.