

7 Tips for Better Sleep

By Dr. Lori Deutsch

When we don't get enough sleep, our minds feel unclear and dull, our reaction time is slow, we are less efficient and productive, and we tend to be more easily irritated. Worse yet, sleep deprivation can weaken our immune system, lead to depression and weight gain, and impede memory. On the other hand, a good night's sleep allows our bodies to self-heal. During deep sleep, for example, our bodies produce human growth hormone (HGH). HGH, our "fountain of youth," builds muscle and strong bones, repairs tissues, improves thyroid function and provides many other health benefits. If you want to enjoy great health and age more slowly, you need to sleep well. These 7 tips will help you get the sleep you need!

Tip #1: Stay hydrated

Dehydration affects the body's performance on every level. Research shows that driving while dehydrated reduces concentration and reaction time at a level similar to driving while drunk, and a mere 2% deficiency in hydration can cause a 10% decrease in athletic performance. Dehydration can also cause insomnia and restless sleep. It reduces the amount of tryptophan in the brain, which in turn decreases serotonin, our calming brain neurotransmitter, and melatonin, our sleep-regulating hormone. Dehydration can also cause poor blood circulation and muscle cramps, a common sleep disturber for many people.

How much water should you drink?

- * Water requirements can vary from day to day, depending on age, body size, activity level, climate, type of food consumed, and other factors.
- * There are several formulas for how much water to drink. Here is one: Drink at least half your body weight in ounces every day. For example, if you weigh 130 pounds, divide that by 2 for a total of 65 ounces. That's a little over 8 cups of water a day (1 cup equals

8 ounces). However, if you have dry skin or hair, constipation or hard stools, frequent thirst, headaches, fatigue and/or dizziness, you may need 10 or more cups a day.

- * Don't rely only on water. Hydrate with high-water-content fruits and vegetables as well, such as cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, grapefruits and salad greens. Soups and smoothies help too.
- * Upon awakening, begin hydrating with 2 cups of pure water, either room temperature or warmish-hot. Add fresh squeezed lemon, if you'd like.
- * Drink 2 cups of water 30 minutes **before** meals. Drink 2 cups of water 2 hours **after** meals, excluding dinner as it is best to decrease liquid intake 2 hours before bed.
- * Avoid soda and caffeinated beverages; they are dehydrating. Alcohol and coffee actually act as diuretics, which make us lose water.
- * Drink pure, filtered water. Avoid plastic bottles, which leech toxins into the water. Glass and stainless steel are best. If you would like a recommendation for a high quality water purification system, feel free to contact me: lori@lorideutsch.com

Tip #2: Move Your Body

Studies have shown that exercise helps people sleep significantly better. Exercise releases endorphins and neurotransmitters, which have calming and/or mood-enhancing effects. So if you want some deep sleep, get some exercise!

- * People sleep better and feel more alert during the day if they get at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a week, according to recent research. It's best to exercise at least 4 days a week. I take a brisk 30 minute walk every day with longer hikes on most weekends.
- * Get moving earlier. One study showed that working out in the morning provided better quality sleep that night, with up to 75% more "deep sleep" than when exercising later in the day.
- * Move around outdoors. Exposure to daylight without sunglasses increases the production of melatonin, which is directly related to sleep.

- * No exercise close to bedtime. Vigorous exercise raises your body temperature and can interfere with sleep.
- * Sit less. Multiple studies have concluded that sitting too much is bad for your health. Even exercising several times a week does not counteract the adverse effects of prolonged sitting.
- * Keep moving. Get up from your chair every 15 to 20 minutes, even if you just walk around your desk and sit down again. Even better, stride over to the water fountain or take a few minutes to stretch – either seated or standing.
- * Equip your desk with a sit-stand desktop option. There are several on the market.
- * Use a fitness tracker. Challenge yourself to get 7,000 to 10,000 steps each day.
- * Have fun. Movement is more easily sustained if it's enjoyable. Hike a woodsy trail, do yoga with friends, or dance to your favorite tunes.

Tip #3: Food Matters

When it comes to attaining restful sleep, *when* you eat is just as important as what you eat.

- * Caffeine can not only cause difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, it can even prevent deep, restful sleep. If you have sleep issues, it's best to eliminate caffeine altogether. Some people do not metabolize caffeine efficiently and its effects can last long after consumption. If you must have your daily fix, stick with just one caffeinated drink in the early morning.
- * It's best to stop eating 3 hours before bed, and avoid over-eating at dinner. Your body will be more apt to sleep deeply if it's not busy digesting.
- * Limit liquids at least 2 hours before bed so your bladder won't wake you prematurely.
- * If you're hungry or your mouth is dry right before bed, try drinking just 2 ounces (or less) of hot water. It's surprisingly soothing and can quench both hunger and thirst.
- * Avoid sugar in the evening. This can cause a spike in blood sugar that's destined to drop later. Unbalanced blood sugar can wake you up, and keep you up.
- * Alcohol metabolizes like sugar in the body. Although a drink before bed might help you fall asleep, studies have shown that it makes you more likely to wake up during the night.

- * Eating protein at each meal helps keep your blood sugar stable. Turkey is a great dinner food. It is high in tryptophan, an amino acid that converts into serotonin and melatonin, our calming brain chemicals. Fish also has a calming effect and it's a light, easily digestible dinner choice.
- * Sleeping through the night requires long-lasting fuel, and fat helps. Get a fair amount of healthy fats daily, such as coconut oil, olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds and fatty fish like salmon.
- * Fruits and vegetables are healthy carbohydrates that provide us with vitamins and minerals for all body processes, including sleep. Magnesium, for example, is a natural tranquilizer that relaxes the muscles. Green leafy vegetables are an excellent source.
- * Each individual is different. Experiment with your body. If you are suffering with insomnia or not waking up refreshed, try changing your diet.

Tip #4: Create Sleep Hygiene

What you do in the period before going to bed can make a huge difference in your quality of sleep.

- * Light Management. We evolved to sleep in the dark. Exposure to light – even a dim night-light, the glow of a digital clock, or the light sneaking in around your door or curtains – can interfere with sleep. So sleep in total darkness. Use black-out window treatments. Cover or remove all sources of light. Refrain from turning on lights at night, even when you go to the bathroom. For good measure, ease into darkness by dimming all lights an hour before bed.
- * Regulate the temperature. The best room temperature for optimal sleep is cool; studies suggest between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit. If your hands and feet tend to be cold, use a hot water bottle to warm up the bed before you get in. Then hug the hot water bottle to your chest to warm your core and hands. Once you've relaxed, push the bottle down to warm your feet. Wearing socks can help too.
- * Keep it quiet. If need be, use a white noise machine and/or comfortable earplugs.
- * Reserve your bed for sleeping. Avoid stimulating activities like watching TV and doing work in bed as it may be harder to get into relaxation mode when you need to.

- * Invest in a comfortable mattress, pillow and blanket, but beware of chemicals (buy organic!).
- * Consider separate bedrooms or beds. Sharing a bed with a restless or noisy partner (or pet!) can impair sleep. At the very least, have separate blankets!

Tip #5: Timing is Everything

Tuning your body clock to the rhythms of nature encourages deep, restful sleep.

- * Go to bed as early as possible. Prior to the invention of electricity, humans went to sleep shortly after sundown. Most animals still do that, as nature intended.
- * According to Ayurveda, India's ancient healing system, we get the deepest sleep between 10:00 p.m. and midnight. Those two hours provide profoundly healing sleep. In general, the perfect sleep stretch is from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., which provides a more powerful experience of rest and rejuvenation than any other 8-hour period.
- * Develop a regular bedtime schedule and stick to it as much as possible, even on weekends.
- * Set an alarm to GO to bed early! That way, you may be able to wake up on time without one.
- * Ask your friends and family to support you in going to bed early.

Tip #6: Escape Electronics

An electromagnetic field (EMF) is an invisible field of energy that surrounds electrical wiring and devices. EMFs may impact melatonin production and thereby impair sleep.

- * If possible, remove televisions, radios and computers from the bedroom. At the very least, shut them off and cover them before bed.
- * Turn off all electronics one hour before bed, especially in the area where you sleep, including WI-FI, cell and portable phones. You can put your cell phone on airplane while it's charging, and still use your phone's alarm.

- * If you must have an alarm clock or other electrical device in the bedroom, make sure it's at least 3 to 6 feet away from your head.
- * Block blue light. Smart phones, laptops and tablets emit blue light, which inhibits the body's production of melatonin. This can cause insomnia and other health issues. The best way to escape blue light is to avoid brightly lit electronics in the evening, and during the night. Research has shown that our eyes can detect blue light even through closed eyelids! Wearing amber blue-light blocking glasses for 3 hours before bedtime can improve sleep quality, according to studies. Here is a link to the amber-anti-blue-light glasses that I use: https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00BQ7KBV4?psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_detailpage_o00_s00

Tip #7: De-Stress

Nothing robs us of sleep more than stress. Stress raises cortisol and other chemicals that activate the nervous system, making it hard to settle down. After all, the fight or flight response is meant to make us run, not rest. Therefore, reducing stress is one of the most important things we can do, especially before bed.

- * Get a load off your mind. Write down what you have to do the next day, so you're not ruminating or worrying that you might forget things.
- * Take a warm/hot bath or shower. Add a few drops of calming essential oil to the bath, such as true lavender, Roman chamomile, sweet marjoram, sandalwood or rose. Research has shown that people who take a warm bath before bed not only fall asleep more quickly, but also get better quality sleep.
- * Play soothing music. According to one study, soft and slow music before bed can lower the heart rate, deepen the breath, and promote restful sleep.
- * Breathe into a calm state: Take a slow deep breath through your nose. At the top of the breath, hold for 2 seconds. Exhale long and slow.
- * Use visualization to create happy thoughts. Imagine yourself relaxing on a warm, sandy beach with a delicious breeze lulling you to sleep. Or, replay sweet moments with family or friends.

- * Wind down with gentle yoga, meditation, prayer, journaling, or reading an uplifting book.
- * If sleep still eludes you, instead of getting anxious or trying to force sleep to come, just relax and enjoy the rest your body is getting. If your attention drifts to tense areas of the body, notice the feeling and allow the tension to gradually dissolve.

If you are still not getting a good night's sleep after incorporating these tips, you will need further assistance. Acupuncture is one of the best ways to relieve stress, balance the body, and improve sleep. There may also be underlying issues that need to be addressed. For example, your hormones may be out of whack. Imbalanced adrenal and sex hormones can lead to insufficient sleep or decrease the quality of sleep. By attaining a comprehensive health history and ordering Functional Medicine lab tests that measure your hormone levels, brain neurotransmitters, and other bodily systems, I can help you achieve quality sleep and better overall health. Sweet dreams!