

5 Secrets for a Good Night's Sleep

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When it comes to sleep, it's not just about quantity (the 7 to 8 hours that experts say you need). Quality counts, too.

"Interrupted sleep isn't restorative," says Michael Breus, PhD, the author of *Good Night: The Sleep Doctor's 4-Week Program to Better Sleep and Better Health*.

Lots of things can rob you of precious sleep. If you find yourself waking often, follow this advice to sleep easier all night long.

1. Ease Stress and Worry

Keeping up a frantic pace until you collapse into bed isn't a smart sleep strategy. "A revved-up mind remains in a mild state of alertness even while you sleep, making you susceptible to nighttime awakenings," Breus says.

Before turning in, try these tips to unwind:

- Meditate.
- Do some light stretching.
- Read (but not on an electronic device, because the light can make it hard to get sleepy).
- Write in a "worry journal." You may ease stress if you jot down your concerns or tomorrow's action items before calling it a night.
- Count backward by 3s from 300 to distract yourself when nagging thoughts are keeping you awake. Then, if you still can't settle down, grab that worry journal again.

2. Update Your Bed

Chronic pain can disrupt your sleep. If an achy back or hip routinely wakes you up, it's time to take a look at what you're resting on. It might be time to:

- Get a new mattress. "Mattresses lose support with age and use," Breus says. He recommends buying a new one at least every 7 years (or more frequently if you have severe back or joint pain). Research suggests a more flexible mattress eases back pain better than an ultra-firm one.
- Swap out your pillows. Do this once a year. Choose a thick one if you're a side sleeper, a flatter one if you like to doze on your belly.

3. Get the Temperature Just Right

A too-warm room can have you awake and kicking off the covers at 2 a.m.

"The sweet spot for sleep seems to be somewhere between 68 and 74 degrees," says Tracey Marks, MD, author of *Master Your Sleep: Proven Methods Simplified*.

So if you find you're overheated during the night, turn down the thermostat.

Also, spicy or acidic foods, alcohol, and caffeinated drinks can rev your metabolism and make you sweat more in the middle of the night. So avoid eating or drinking them too close to bedtime.

4. Solve Sleep Apnea and Snoring Problems

Snoring can cause you to wake up in the middle of the night. So can sleep apnea, a disorder that causes you to stop breathing for several seconds while you sleep.

"Many people don't realize that the reason they're waking at night is because they can't catch their breath," Marks says.

If you have sleep apnea, your bed partner may say that you jerk a lot at night or may complain that you're a loud snorer.

"Morning headaches and excessive daytime drowsiness also indicate a problem," Marks says.

To get help, you'll first need to get diagnosed. Talk to your doctor or try signing up for a sleep study. If you have apnea, you may need to wear an airway pressure mask at night. Losing weight, curbing alcohol, and stopping smoking will also help.

5. Turn Off the Electronics

If it lights up and beeps, it disrupts sleep, Marks says.

That includes smartphones, tablets, computers, and other gadgets.

For a better night's rest, keep them out of the bedroom. Save the work and social media for anywhere else in your house.

SOURCES:

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Tracey Marks, MD, author, *Master Your Sleep: Proven Methods Simplified*, Bascom Hill Publishing Group, 2011.

<http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/sleep-wreckers>