



# Steps Toward Better Sleep



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While an honored part of many cultural practices throughout history, sleep has somehow lost value in today's hectic society. We feel compelled to do but forget that we need to rest! As energy constantly bombards us in a variety of forms – light, sound, movement, and information – our bodies' natural rhythms are disrupted. Our ability to achieve both the quantity and quality of sleep we need is compromised and we are left feeling totally exhausted.

We may reach for stimulants during the day to keep us going but then depend on relaxants to help us wind down at night. This creates a vicious cycle – and an unhealthy dependence – that may lead us to gain weight, lose mental clarity, feel emotionally drained, and eventually diminish our general health.

Fortunately, there are steps we can take to improve our quality of sleep and give ourselves the deserved rest we need to function. Several factors contribute to how well we sleep, including what and when we eat and drink (nutrition), where we sleep (environment), and our energy output during the day (daily rhythms).

**Read on to learn how modifying these factors can help improve your sleep quality.**



## NUTRITION

What and when you eat affects your body's natural ability to both energize and rest. As Health Coaches, we know that eating a well-balanced diet promotes greater health and that both when and what we eat affects how we feel. By eating a variety of foods, we help ensure that we're getting the nutrients we need to maintain our energy levels throughout the day so that we're not relying on stimulants to keep us active.<sup>1</sup> Consuming our largest meal in the middle of the day and a lighter meal in the evening can also help us take full advantage of our body's natural nighttime repair process.

### **Keep the following in mind when it comes to getting a good night's sleep:**

- Eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods and limit sugar and caffeine intake.
- Experiment with light evening meals and crowd out late-night snacking with yoga, journaling, reading, or connecting with a loved one. Digestion requires energy – when a large meal is consumed at night, it interferes with the body's ability to rest.
- Avoid late-night beverages. Ingesting liquids right before bed often leads to a dreaded middle-of-the-night bathroom run, which disturbs the sleep cycle and therefore hinders sleep quality.



## ENVIRONMENT

Getting a good night's sleep depends on creating a peaceful bedroom. There are many ways to create a sleep-friendly environment. For instance, you can paint your walls a calming color, use an aromatherapy diffuser, or invest in a new mattress. There are also several easy and low-cost ways to ensure your bedroom is conducive to deep sleep.<sup>2</sup>

### Consider these ideas for transforming your bedroom into a peaceful rest haven:

- **Clean out the clutter.** The old saying “A cluttered space is a cluttered mind” is so true! When you have lots of clutter in your bedroom (exercise equipment, office work, piles of unfolded laundry, etc.), you often feel the energy of the clutter in the form of stress in your mind. Something as simple as making your bed may help you feel mentally clearer – and we all know how much easier it is to sleep when your mind is still.
- **Remove all electronics from your room.** This includes TVs, computers, laptops, cell phones, video games, tablets, e-readers, etc. These devices emit artificial “blue light” that can affect your body’s production of melatonin and, in turn, your quality and quantity of sleep.<sup>3</sup> You may even wish to put your alarm clock under your bed or nightstand so that the light of the clock is not distracting. If you use a cell phone as your alarm clock, put it on airplane mode so you’re not distracted by text messages, emails, or games during the night.
- **Reduce exposure to light and sound.** You might consider investing in thick curtains to keep light out of your room or less-expensive options, like an eye mask, headband, or even a scarf wrapped around your eyes. To minimize distracting outside sounds, use a fan (for white noise), earplugs, or noise-canceling headphones. You may even want to roll up a towel to put at the base of your door to not only block out excess light but also reduce any sounds outside your bedroom.



## DAILY RHYTHMS

As discussed, our bodies take cues from our actions. What we eat, when we eat it, what we do, and when we do it are all part of an intricate system of signals that our brain uses to regulate all it needs to do for us to thrive and survive. Honoring these rhythms is vital to our well-being.

**Here are a few more things to consider when it comes to feeling well-rested:**

- **Create a bedtime routine.** Going to bed and waking up at a similar time each day can help the body get into a healthy rhythm.
- **Experiment with restorative evening activities.** Things like meditation, yoga, or being intimate with your partner may all be considered relaxing activities to help prepare you for bedtime.
- **Track your sleep habits.** Sleep trackers are wearable devices that typically monitor heart rate, breathing patterns, and movement while you sleep. Exploring your sleep habits can help identify any adjustments to your routine or sleeping environment that are needed.
- **Reduce “busy brain” at night.** You may find it helpful to keep a journal and pen near your bed. If you think of something, jot it down, knowing it won't be forgotten and can be considered in the morning.

The missing link to your healthy lifestyle may just be a good night's sleep. Taking steps toward improving your sleep is essential for optimal health.

**Sweet dreams!**

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## FOOTNOTES

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- 1| Sleep.org. *National Sleep Foundation*. Retrieved from [sleep.org](https://sleep.org)
- 2| Lights out for a good night's sleep. (n.d.). *National Sleep Foundation*. Retrieved from [sleepfoundation.org/sleep-news/lights-out-good-nights-sleep](https://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-news/lights-out-good-nights-sleep)
- 3| Schmerler, J. (2015). Q&A: Why is blue light before bedtime bad for sleep? *Scientific American*. Retrieved from [scientificamerican.com/article/q-a-why-is-blue-light-before-bedtime-bad-for-sleep](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/q-a-why-is-blue-light-before-bedtime-bad-for-sleep)