

SLEEP TIPS

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Quality and consistent sleep plays a vital role in good health, and although we're familiar with the amazing feeling of being refreshed after a good night's sleep, or, conversely, the fatigue that comes from poor sleep, most of us are still not getting enough rest or good quality sleep.

Healthy sleep patterns help protect your mental and physical wellbeing, and safety. The way you feel when you're awake depends in part on what happens while you're sleeping. During sleep, your body is working to restore calm from the day's activities; repairing damaged cells, and recharging your heart and cardiovascular system for the next day. In children and teens, sleep also helps support growth and development.

The sleep cycle consists of two recurring phases: REM (rapid eye movement) and NREM (non rapid eye movement). Both phases are important for different functions in our bodies.

NREM sleep typically makes up 75 to 80% of our total sleep each night, and many of the health benefits of sleep take place during this phase. Tissue growth and repair occurs; the hormones that are essential for growth and development are released, and our energy is restored.

REM sleep makes up the remaining 20 to 25% of total sleep each night. This is the phase when dreaming occurs, and it is essential that we dream in order for our minds to process and consolidate memories and emotions, and to relieve stress.

When NREM and REM cycles are interrupted throughout the night due to waking up frequently, difficulty breathing, or snoring, then our bodies cannot efficiently carry out the vital restorative processes that keep us healthy.

When your body cannot recharge on a regular basis, your nervous system becomes strained. The effects of ongoing sleep deficiency can impair your ability to think clearly, react quickly to stimuli, learn, work, process emotions in a measured way, recover from mental, emotional, and physical stress, and heal bodily wounds. A lack of restorative sleep also increases your risk for chronic disease.

In addition to a healthy diet and regular exercise, here are some strategies that can improve your quality of sleep.

Gentle Stretches

This stretch series can be completed in about 15 minutes.

Seated Neck Release:

1. Sit on the floor in a cross-legged position or in a chair with your feet flat on the ground.
2. Extend your right arm next to your right knee or along the right side of the chair.
3. Place your left hand on the top of your head, and slowly tilt your head to the left.
4. Apply gentle pressure with your hand to increase the stretch. (To feel a deeper stretch, you can hold onto your right knee or the seat of the chair. This stabilizes the torso and allows you to

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- isolate the stretch on the side of your neck.)
5. Hold on this side for 30 seconds, then slowly lift your head up, and repeat this stretch on the other side.
 6. Repeat the sequence.

Shoulder Rolls:

1. Stand in a neutral position with your body aligned.
2. Roll your shoulders up, then back, then down in a fluid motion.
3. Repeat this backwards movement 10 times.
4. Reverse the movement, and roll forwards 10 times.

Tricep Stretch:

1. Reach your left arm over your head, placing your left hand on the front of your right elbow.
2. Gently pull your right elbow back until you feel a little tension.
3. Release your right elbow, and lower your right arm to your side.
4. Bend your left elbow, and repeat the stretch with your left arm.
5. Repeat both sides.

Seated Hip Stretch:

1. Sit up tall, and cross your right ankle over your left knee.
2. Gently lean forward, keeping your back straight, and reaching out with your torso until you feel a stretch in your right glute and hip. (You can also press down on the right knee to deepen the stretch.)
3. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, and repeat the stretch on the other side. (Skip this move if it bothers your knees.)
4. Repeat this sequence on both sides.

Breathwork – The 4-7-8 Breath Cycle

This relaxing breathing exercise takes only a few minutes, and can be done anytime and anywhere for relaxation and better sleep. You can do this exercise in any position (including laying in bed). However, when first learning the exercise, sit with your back straight.

1. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue. (Try pursing your lips slightly if the tongue position feels awkward.)
2. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
3. Close your mouth, and inhale gently through your nose for 4 counts.
4. Hold your breath for 7 counts.
5. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound for 8 counts. This cycle is 1 complete breath.
6. Inhale again, and repeat the breath cycle 3 more times, for a total of 4 complete breath cycles.

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*Notes about technique:

Inhale/Exhale: Inhale quietly through your nose, and exhale audibly through your mouth.

Timing: Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The actual time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up, but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the 3 phases. With practice, you should be able to slow the exercise down, inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

Frequency: This breathing exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them, but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it, but becomes more powerful with repetition and practice.

Number of breaths: Don't do more than 4 complete breath cycles at one time for the first month of practice. Then, if you wish, extend the practice to 8 complete breath cycles. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first start the exercise, don't be concerned; the feeling should pass. However, if you continue to feel light-headed for extended periods, stop the exercise, and consult your healthcare practitioner.

Uses: Once you practice this breathing technique and get comfortable with it, use this powerful tool to relieve physical tension and emotional or mental stress, and to help you get better quality sleep.

Drinking Herbal Tea

There are several varieties of herbal tea that can help you get to sleep and stay asleep. See our [Resource Guide](#) for specific brand recommendations.

Peppermint Tea (*Mentha Piperita*):

The menthol contained in peppermint is a natural muscle relaxant and stress reliever, making this aromatic tea a wonderful sleep aid.

Chamomile Tea (*Matricaria Recutita*):

This trusty favorite not only reduces stress and anxiety, but also helps treat insomnia. Just like peppermint tea, the chamomile variety has fantastic relaxation properties.

Green Tea (*Camella Sinensis*):

Although green tea contains caffeine, it's adaptogenic in nature, so while it keeps you alert, it is also calming. The polyphenols in green tea help combat anxiety and stress to aid restful sleep.

Rose Tea (*Rosa Centifolia*):

This exquisite tea also relieves stress and anxiety while it calms the mind and opens up the heart chakra. Rose tea can be made with fresh or dried rose petals. If using fresh petals, wash them thoroughly before steeping. Add the petals to 1 cup of boiling water. Steep the petals for 5 to 10 minutes until the petals turn dark. Strain, then drink.

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Passion Flower Tea (*Passiflora Incanata*):

The flavone chrysin contained in passion flower acts as a natural stress and anxiety reliever, and also helps to induce sleep. Add 1 tablespoon of dried passion flower to 1 cup of boiling water. Allow the flowers to steep for 10 minutes. Strain, then drink.

***Note:** Pregnant and lactating women and children under 6 months of age should avoid drinking Passion Flower Tea. Although this tea variety is safe and doesn't cause adverse effects when taken with other sedatives, we recommend not drinking this tea if you're taking any sleep medication.

Enjoy the ritual of preparing and enjoying tea.

The power of drinking tea lies with breathing in their aromatics, and sipping them slowly. Try drinking your tea while relaxing in other ways such as taking a bath; listening to music; journaling; reflecting on positive moments from your day; or manifesting what you would like to create in your life. It can also be powerful to drink tea after your daily meditation or workout to recalibrate.

Detox Baths

We recommend soaking in a magnesium salt bath for 30 to 40 minutes before bedtime to open the pores, draw out toxins, balance pH levels, and infuse the body with magnesium to lower stress-related hormones for restful sleep.

To a full tub of hot water add:

- 1 cup Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate)
- ½ cup aluminium-free baking soda
- 5 to 10 drops lavender essential oil

Essential Oils

There are many ways to use essential oils to support rest and relaxation.

Use 3 to 5 drops of any of the following essential oils:

- Lavender
- Roman Chamomile
- Ylang-Ylang
- Bergamot
- Vetiver

And apply them in one of the following ways:

- Mix into a small amount of natural lotion, and massage into to the soles of your feet before bed.
- Mix with a carrier oil (sweet almond or coconut) and apply to the neck and chest, or any other parts of your body.
- Add to water in an oil burner or diffuser.
- Add to your detox bath and breathe deeply while soaking.

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Unplug

A couple of hours before bedtime, turn off your phone, laptop, tablet, television, and any other electronic visual stimuli, and keep these devices out of your bedroom.

Listen

Many people find it soothing to listen to instrumental music, a guided audio meditation, or playing a sound machine with waves, waterfalls, or wildlife.

Progressive Body Relaxation - Head to Toe

This practice is really effective for inducing sleep.

1. Lay down in bed.
2. Begin inhaling and exhaling deeply for 3 breaths.
3. Continue breathing deeply, and focus your attention on the top of the head. With each breath, imagine inhaling rays of light through your scalp. Keep breathing until you feel your head relax and let go.
4. Notice any other areas of tension that remain in your body. Focus on breathing light into those areas until the tension releases.
5. Repeat this process, slowly moving your focus down your body through the neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, stomach, hips, legs, and feet.
6. Once you've breathed light into your entire body, repeat the process (if needed) beginning at your head and making your way down your body until you drift off to sleep.

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