

Live the Dream of Better Sleep

Sleep is something that comes naturally, right? Not always. Sometimes a good night's sleep doesn't come so easily. Improving sleep means taking charge of your nights and making sleep a priority.

Wake up to better health

Getting enough sleep is important not only because it helps you feel better during the day, but because it plays a critical role in maintaining your good health.

- **Bad sleep is chronic.** Poor sleep results in an increased risk of developing chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.
- **Hormones wreak havoc.** Missing out on adequate sleep can interfere with your body's hormones, leading to irritability, mood swings, cognitive impairment and slowed motor coordination.
- **You don't have immunity for the next challenge.** Lack of sleep can also affect your immune system, making you more likely to get sick with colds, flus and other illnesses.

Power down your brain

While a big part of your ability to sleep well has to do with your sleep environment, your own mind may be part of what's disturbing your rest. Here's what people say is keeping them up at night:

- **Family matters.** 23% say family issues are preventing them from sleeping.
- **Sleep debt.** 16% blame personal finances for lack of shut-eye.
- **As the world turns.** 2% are awake because of current events.

Turning off your worries and thoughts is essential if you're going to sleep well. Meditation before bed can help sweep the debris in your mind into a corner. Making your bedroom a worry-free zone allows you to sleep freely. Keep everything that relates to work or stress (like your phone, TV, paperwork, bills, etc.) in a separate room, physically separated from where you sleep.

Schedule a sleep appointment

Getting yourself into a routine where you go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time (even on weekends) will lull your body into the habit of regular sleep. Be very strict with your bedtime. Don't let yourself get distracted by social media, what's on TV or work you didn't get done. When it's bedtime, just go to bed, no matter what. Soon your body will be on board and you will naturally fall asleep and wake up when you are supposed to.

Since we spend 33% of our lives asleep, improving sleep means improving one-third of your life — not to mention that those benefits carry over to when you're awake too!

Cast a sleep spell

Set up a routine that you can do every night before bed. Make sure you have time to unwind before your bedtime ritual begins. Then follow the same series of steps that lead you from being awake to being asleep every night. For example: lock the doors, turn the dishwasher on, put your pajamas on, wash your face, brush your teeth, pull the blinds, fluff your pillows, turn on gentle music, read a few pages of a book, then turn off the light and gently allow your mind to drift among pleasant thoughts. Doing the same things every single night signals to your body that sleep is coming and helps your body and mind relax so sleep comes easily.

Make your bed for good sleep

The biggest factor in how well you're sleeping is your mattress. A mattress that is old or uncomfortable results in aches and pains, tossing and turning, and sleep that is not as restful and restorative as it should be. If you're not waking up feeling refreshed and relaxed, it's time to take a look at your mattress and evaluate its condition.

- **Lumps and bumps.** A mattress that is uneven needs to be replaced.
- **Rags to riches.** If your mattress is visibly worn, tattered or stained, it is begging for an upgrade.
- **Cheating on your mattress.** Have you had a better night's sleep at a hotel or at a friend's house than you get at home? If so, your mattress is not doing its job and needs to be replaced.
- **Age discrimination.** The life span of a mattress is no more than five to seven years. It's time to replace it once you reach that threshold.

Secrets to a sweet sleep suite

If you've ever tried to fall asleep in a place like an airport or a hospital you know that the environment around you has a tremendous impact on how well you're able to sleep. If you want better sleep, work on making your bedroom welcoming to sleep.

- **Cool it off.** A bedroom should have a temperature between 65 and 67 degrees for comfortable sleeping. Turn down the thermostat, plug in an air conditioner or open the window to get your room to the right temperature.
- **Sleep unplugged.** Your bedroom should be for sleep and sex only, so keep laptops, tablets, smartphones and televisions out of your room. Not only do they offer distractions from sleep, but the blue light emitted by their screens disturbs sleep.
- **Create comfort.** Make sure your bedroom is a space that feels welcoming and comfortable so it's a place you look forward to ending your day in.
- **Props to pillows.** A great mattress and a quiet comfortable room aren't going to bring you wonderful sleep if you're resting your head on a bad pillow. Replace your pillows every year and be sure they are giving you the neck and spine support you need.

Doctor Snooze

Most people are able to achieve deep, restful sleep once they create a healthy sleep environment and routine. However, there are some situations in which you should seek medical help with your sleep. If you're sleeping 7 or 8 hours but are still sleepy during the day, have insomnia, find yourself falling asleep during important tasks, wake frequently during the night or you snore, seeing a medical professional can help you get the sleep you need.



Clean up your sleep

Clean sleeping, like clean eating, allows you to achieve good mental and physical health by taking sleep seriously and committing to getting the amount of sleep your body needs, without pills, prescriptions or sleep aids. Naturally adjusting your surroundings and activities allows you to gently slip into sleep each night. Clean sleep can be the key to gentle aging, lowered stress and anxiety, staying slim, and looking and feeling good. Take these steps to achieve clean sleep: **Sleep scents.** Aromatherapy using lavender or sandalwood can relax your body for sleep.