

How to Optimize Your Sleep Naturally

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For those who suffer from too much or too little sleep, disturbed sleep, or inability to fall or remain asleep, please enjoy this helpful holistic guide. Choose as many of the following steps to implement simultaneously as you can—the more the better. They all work synergistically to support each other!

1. Make your bedroom a sacred space only for sleeping/rest and sex. Avoid working or studying there. Your bodymind learns to do in a space what you normally do in a space. Remove all electronics (except a small device to play a relaxation tape, if you are doing that). No TV (remember, TV is about staying awake and watching something, also adds stress to your mind.). Keep your cell phone in another room and powered off at night. If you need it for the alarm, put it as far away from you as possible so you can still hear the alarm.
2. Wear foam noise-reducing ear plugs and eye shades. The straps don't have to be tight.
3. Use room-darkening shades. Cover all windows, even small ones. I use 2 throw pillows from my bed to block the ½-moon window over the large shaded window in my bedroom.
4. Use white noise: a white noise maker, an air/HEPA filter. I have a large HEPA filter in my foyer that I can hear all over my house. It's miraculous to reduce/hide background noise.
5. Avoid eating 3-4 hours before bedtime. A full stomach will mean a night of digesting which is disturbing to sleep.
6. Avoid drinking within an hour of bedtime and do most of your hydration earlier in the day. Getting up to urinate 1 or more times during the night disturbs sleep.
7. Drink relaxing herbal tea after dinner but not too late in the evening. Recommended teas include SleepyTime teas, chamomile teas, kava teas (Yogi Stress Relief). Herbal detox teas should happen in the morning, since they are diuretic and will make you urinate.
8. Take 1 or more capsules of valerian root an hour before bedtime. Valerian root is a powerful sleep-inducing herb that has none of the negative side effects of sleep pharmaceuticals that leaves people feeling rested but not groggy. It is also not addictive. Another alternative is melatonin, which can also be taken before bed in low doses (start w/.5 to 1mg and go up to 3 to 5 mg if needed).
9. Aim to get to bed before midnight and sleep for at least 8 hours. Deep sleep (without dreams) occurs more at night than sleeping during the day. Your body also makes more melatonin and human growth hormone during the night, not during the day. You can't fool Mother Nature!
10. Get up in the morning and get as much sunlight as possible during the day, including sunbathing for 15 minutes in a bathing suit on both sides (front & back) of your body. Sunlight during the day, especially into your eyes when it stimulates your pineal gland, increases melatonin production and deepens sleep. In addition, avoid wearing dark sunglasses every time you're outside. Don't look directly into the sun, of course, but blocking all sun to your eyes will reduce melatonin, HGH, and reduce sleep quality.

11. Exercise. Exercise reduces tension in the body and tires the muscles, which leads to deeper, more relaxing sleep. Not exercising allows tension to build up in the body, which then keeps the mind from discharging tension and leads to restlessness, monkey mind, and insomnia.
12. Practice a bodymind relaxation practice, such as yoga or tai chi. Slow, meditative movement and/or stretching with sustained deep breathing is profoundly effective in reducing tension and improving ease in the mind and body. Deep breathing turns off the fight-flight-freeze response and triggers the parasympathetic autonomous nervous system to literally change the chemical composition of your body and its functioning, in order to invite deep relaxation, recovery, and healing. Practicing before bed is very effective as a sleep-promoting routine. Using incense and gentle, quiet music can enhance your practice. Always include deep relaxation at the end of your practice, totally letting go. Perhaps complete your personal hygiene prior to your practice, so you can go right to bed after...or even do it in your bed.
13. Meditate. Learn how to meditate and practice up to 20 minutes per day, twice per day. Meditation with sustained deep breathing clears the mind, also reduces tension, and heightens awareness about what is really bothering you, so you can address it. It also allows you to develop the ability to *witness* your suffering without being as pulled in by it. When disturbing content arises, imagine you're watching it on a movie screen and sitting as far back in the theatre as you need to in order to feel safe. Avoid going into the movie. Just watch it. If you can't go to sleep or wake up and can't return to sleep, practice meditating and tell yourself you're not wasting time but are actually doing something that's improving your bodymind health.
14. Eat food that is calming rather than stress inducing. Plant food is more calming for the body. Animal food includes stress hormones from the suffering prior to death as well as other powerful toxicities. Foods that contain tryptophan—such as walnuts, pumpkin, leafy greens, mushrooms, soy (organic or non-GMO), wheat (organic), potato—create more melatonin and serotonin, which promote better sleep and mood. Animal products contain cytokines, which degrade tryptophan. The fiber, antioxidants, and omega 3 fats and other nutrients such as Vitamins B6 & C, magnesium, and iron also reduce cytokines and allow tryptophan to flourish and be better absorbed.
15. Avoid distressing media, such as violence TV or movies (or even the news), especially before bed. Your mind takes those stressful images into sleep and perpetuates them into your dreams. Even though your cognitive brain may know they aren't real or directly threatening you, your mid and lower brains are more childlike and do not. You are literally traumatizing your brain and engaging your sympathetic autonomic nervous system fight-flight-freeze response.
16. Take an Epsom salt bath, preferably before bed. Put 2 cups of Epsom salts in a warm (summer) or hot (winter) bath, and perhaps 3-5 drops of lavender essential oil. Epsom salts are made of magnesium, which absorbs through your skin and relaxes your muscles as well as your mind. Play some relaxing music, reduce lighting, avoid electronics, and really let go.
17. Obtain a health weight. Obesity makes breathing more difficult, increases sleep apnea, and makes the entire body less efficient in all processes, including rest and recovery.
18. Try to sleep and wake at similar times as much as possible. We train our bodyminds by the behaviors we repeat.

19. Avoid blue light from electronics at night and turn off all electronics at least 1 hour before your target bed time. There are now free apps for computers and mobile phones that can turn the blue light off from these devices for specific times.
20. Seek out a teacher or coach. Find someone who can help you deal with issues that persistently bother you, improve relationships, bring more love into your life, and who can teach you how to relax, breathe, meditate, learn a bodymind healing practice, and learn how to heal yourself energetically and holistically!