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How to Sleep Better at Night

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Sleep should be as simple as lying down, dozing off, and waking up feeling refreshed. But for many people, a good night's sleep seems like only a dream.

"A lot of things can disrupt sleep, like medical and emotional conditions, but there are things we do as part of our lifestyle that [also] interfere," says Lawrence J. Epstein, MD, chief medical officer at Sleep HealthCenters. "We need to understand the importance of sleep and fitting your lifestyle to meet your needs."

Ready to sleep better at night? Try these solutions for common sleep stresses:

The Sleep Stress: You Can't Turn Off Your Mind
Your Solution:

Create a Pre-Sleep Routine

Do something nightly that marks the end of the day. Whether it's a relaxation exercise, like deep breathing, or something that disengages you from the rest of the day, like reading, a pre-sleep ritual will help you get ready for sleep, Dr. Epstein says.

Your routine should involve taking a step back from technology. "The blue light [from screens] delays the melatonin release that gets you sleepy, and technology keeps your brain active in a way that's not conducive to sleep," says Janet K. Kennedy, PhD, clinical psychologist and founder of NYC Sleep Doctor. "The benefit of doing something like reading is that it occupies your mind and takes it away from the stress of the day."

The Sleep Stress: You Have a Hard Time Dozing Off

Your Solution: Get Out of Bed

If you're unable to fall asleep after 15 to 20 minutes in bed, you might start to get annoyed—which only causes your body to release adrenaline and makes it even harder to doze off. "You don't want to have a negative, frustrated association with the bed, so get out of it," Kennedy says. Instead, sit somewhere comfortable, stay away from technology, and do something quieting that will distract you from feeling anxious about being awake.

The Sleep Stress: You Don't Stay Asleep

Your Solution: Know That It's Okay

"It's normal to get up in the middle of the night. A lot of what causes the problem is people's reaction to it," Kennedy says. If you get frustrated, your body will respond with adrenaline, and you'll have an even more difficult time getting back to sleep. A better idea: Say to yourself, "This is normal. I'll be going back to sleep soon." If you can't relax, get out of bed and do something quieting until you feel calmer.

Also, keep in mind that as we age, our sleep patterns change. Children sleep the majority of the time, but our ability to get consolidated sleep becomes harder, and it's not

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abnormal to get up one or two times a night, Dr. Epstein explains. "It's annoying, but it's okay," he says.

The Sleep Stress: You Wake Up Achy

Your Solution: Sleep on Your Side

Sleep position preference varies from person to person. But anatomically, the best way to sleep is on your side. "Sleeping on your stomach puts pressure on your neck and lower back, and sleeping on your back leads to breathing issues that could compromise sleep quality," Kennedy says. For greater comfort when sleeping on your side, you can place a pillow between your knees to improve spinal alignment.

The Sleep Stress: You Have Tried Everything, and Nothing Works

Your Solution: See Your Doctor

If you try these tips and they don't work, don't give up. "Rather than saying, 'Oh, well. It's just how I am,' see someone," Dr. Epstein says. Check in with your primary care physician, who can determine if you need to see a sleep specialist. Whether you have an ongoing medical condition or chronic symptoms, such as fatigue or joint problems, a professional may be able to help you get the sleep you need.

—Nicole Kwan

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