



Do this during the day for a restful sleep at night

SLEEP | By James B Maas, Rebecca S Robbins, Sharon R Driscoll

We asked sleep-deprived adults why they can't seem to get enough rest at night. Here's a sampling of what they told us:

"I get hungry right before bed and end up eating a big meal." "My bedroom is hot and stuffy,

my mattress sags, and the neighbours are noisy."

"I'm so frustrated when I wake up at night that I start worrying how I'm going to make it through the next day, and then I can't fall back to sleep."

Do any of these predicaments sound familiar? There are many factors that seriously affect the quantity and

quality of our sleep. Fortunately, there are proven strategies that will enable you to overcome common sleep obstacles. Here, we list a some of them.

Avoid caffeine after 2pm

Caffeine stimulates your metabolism, which keeps you awake and alert. It's the magic bullet that allows you and millions of other people to make it through the day, and is the most widely used drug in the world. Yep, it's a drug [albeit legal], consumed by 85 per cent of the population.

Caffeine is a major cause of insomnia, more so than any other food or beverage. Having coffee [or caffeinated tea, soda, energy drink, or chocolate bar] after 2 pm will disrupt your sleep. Caffeine has a half-life of six hours, which means that six hours after your last sip, half the caffeine is still in your body. If you've had several cups during the day, the effect is cumulative. Consuming more than 300mg [three cups of coffee, soda or energy drink] will definitely affect your sleep. However, it can take much less for some individuals; just one cup of coffee in the morning or a cola at lunch can be disruptive.

Everyone's sensitivity to caffeine is different, but it generally increases with age. Caffeine not only makes it more

difficult to fall asleep, but also increases the frequency and duration of night time awakenings. After a poor night's sleep, you have no choice but to rely on more caffeine to get you through the next day. Then, when it's time to go to bed, your heart is racing, you can't sleep, you wake up exhausted in the morning and you reach for more caffeine. Sound like a familiar cycle? Let's break it.

To gauge the effect caffeine has on your sleep; eliminate all caffeine from your diet for one week. Although it'll be hard at first, you'll gradually find that this change allows you to sleep soundly at night and be more productive during the day. If you drink five or more cups daily, you have a dependency problem and will probably find it difficult to go 'cold turkey', so gradually taper your caffeine consumption. Cut it in half each successive day and substitute a glass of unsweetened fruit juice or water.

Women should note that a high intake of caffeine makes it more difficult for them to become pregnant and can also affect the health of the foetus. And if you have any type of heart irregularity you certainly should be avoiding caffeine, which raises your blood pressure and can induce cardiac arrhythmias [abnormal heart beat].

If you miss caffeine, it's okay to gradually add a small portion of mild or decaf coffee back into your diet. But if you're sleeping well, you'll not need any caffeine to make it through the day.

Avoid alcohol three hours before bed

Many people believe that a nightcap facilitates sleep, but alcohol is not a sedative. It's a central nervous system suppressant and in large quantities becomes a stimulant.

A drink after work or early dinner is fine because your body will have plenty of time to absorb the alcohol. But if you drink within three hours of bedtime, it will destroy the quality of your rest. Alcohol causes you to wake up in REM [Rapid Eye Movement] sleep every 90 minutes, so throughout the night you'll be continually shaken and stirred. And be warned that mixing alcohol with sleeping pills or tranquilisers can be lethal.

Quit smoking for instant rest

Nicotine is an even stronger stimulant than caffeine. It makes it hard to fall asleep and maintain sleep. The reason nicotine causes you to lie awake at night is because your body is actually experiencing withdrawal symptoms, craving another hit. Smoking also worsens snoring and may cause life-threatening sleep apnoea.

Apart from being carcinogenic, nicotine increases blood pressure, heart rate and stimulates brain activity. Studies clearly demonstrate that sleep improves immediately when subjects stop smoking; two-pack-a-day smokers who quit, cut the time they lie awake at night in half.



Exercise between 5pm and 7pm

Ask busy executives to recommend the best time to exercise, and they'll typically respond 'early morning'. Wrong answer! An extra hour of sleep does more for your health than running around in a half-awake state. Your body temperature is also

relatively low in the mornings, making it more likely that you'll trip or strain a muscle because you're not fully alert or warmed up.

The best time to work out is between 5 and 7 in the evening. Exercising at this time is more likely to enhance the depth of your sleep. But avoid strenuous exercise [except pleasurable sex!] within three hours of bedtime, because exercise elevates core body temperature for 5 – 6 hours. In order to feel drowsy and stimulate the release of melatonin, body temperature needs to drop.

It's not surprising then that athletes experience more delta-wave [deep], restorative sleep than non-athletes. To approximate that kind of rest, exercise moderately at least five days a week for 20 minutes or more. Any aerobic activity, even fast walking, will not only improve your overall health, but will also improve the quality and quantity of your sleep.

Don't nap unless you must

Once you've established good nocturnal habits and you're sleeping long and well, you should stop feeling

“Ask busy executives to recommend the best time to exercise, and they'll typically respond 'early morning'. Wrong answer!”

tired in the afternoon. If you still occasionally do, it's better to resist the urge to nap rather than risk upsetting your new, effective sleep cycle.

Likewise, if you're a senior citizen, suffering from insomnia, and/or are struggling to get into a consistent sleep pattern, we recommend pushing through the day without a nap. However, if you're burning the candle at both ends, there's a strong flame of evidence that a 20-minute afternoon power nap will make you more alert and productive and less anxious about getting to sleep later.

Be as active as possible

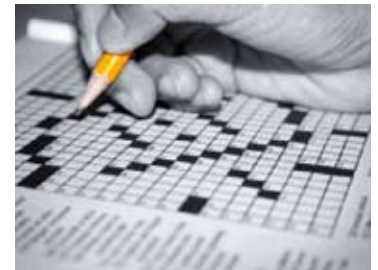
Although it sounds contradictory, boredom can actually cause sleep loss. We see this frequently among elderly.

Poor sleepers tend to spend more time sitting around and watching TV. Good sleepers spend more time working, socialising and pursuing hobbies. They are motivated and excited by life's opportunities. So stay mentally active by getting involved in things that interest you and make you think. Do crossword puzzles or Sudoku; take an online course, join clubs, volunteer at a hospital, school, or social activity.

Eat well

There's a significant link between sleep deprivation and obesity. People sleeping for less than four hours per night are 73 per cent more likely to be obese than those sleeping for 7 – 9 hours. The correlation goes both ways.

Staying in bed longer can actually keep you from gaining weight. The less sleep you're getting, the less efficiently the appetite-regulation system works. People falsely think they're hungry when they're actually sleepy. Instead of a snack, they need some shuteye. Once you understand this, you can begin to use sleep to control and even lose weight. The best solution may be getting one additional hour of sleep every night. If you do that and you're currently overweight, expect to lose an average of one pound per week, all else being constant.



As per a *University of Chicago* study even healthy individuals with an average body mass index [BMI] who slept less than six hours per night experienced hormonal changes that affect their future body weight and overall health. They had to produce 30 per cent more insulin than normal sleepers just to maintain regular blood sugar levels. That alone predisposed them to gaining weight.

Aside from the chemical changes that occur when you're sleeping less, many emotional and behavioural shifts too happen, including an erosion of motivation and coordination that, in turn, make exercise unappealing.

Live a varied life. This will help you feel good about yourself and make it easier to sleep at night.

Stay Well

James B. Maas, Ph.D., is Weiss Presidential Fellow and Professor of Psychology at Cornell University. He is co-founder and CEO of the consulting firm, Sleep for Success, which designs programs for enhancing sleep quality and daytime performance.

Rebecca S. Robbins, B.S., co-founder and President of Sleep for Success, is a doctoral candidate in Communications at Cornell University.

Sharon R. Driscoll is a pre-medical student at Cornell University and a member of the Sleep for Success consulting firm.