

Self-Care Is a Dream: Make It Come True with Better Sleep



Getting plenty of sleep is essential to your self-care. Yet, for many people, the notion of waking up feeling well-rested is just a dream. If you're struggling to get the appropriate amount of rest, the tips below are simple solutions that'll help you get the sleep you need.

Make your bedroom a sleep zone. Surrounding yourself with TVs, computers, and phones before going to bed can literally, leave you feeling "wired" or stressed, making it nearly impossible for you to switch off and fall asleep. Remove sleep disrupters and create a sleep-centered room that is comfortable, cool, quiet, and dark. If you work shifts and usually sleep during daylight hours, consider investing in some blackout curtains, an eye mask, and something to generate white noise (e.g., a fan). Consult with a physician if you think you may be suffering from sleep apnea, a potentially dangerous disorder that slows or stops breathing for 10 seconds or more at a time.

Stay on schedule. Whenever possible, keep your sleep schedule relatively consistent during weekends or days off: try not to go to bed more than an hour past your regular bedtime and limit sleep-ins to an extra hour in the morning.

Exercise (but do it early). Several studies suggest that regular exercise earlier in the day promotes better sleep at night. Ensure you finish your workout two to three hours before you go to bed, as exercising too close to bedtime can actually "wake up" your body and make falling asleep more difficult.

Steer clear of stimulants and sleep disrupters. Consuming stimulants such as caffeine (found in coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate) too close to bedtime may cause you to toss and turn in the middle of the night. Depending on your sensitivity, you may need to avoid caffeinated food and drinks anywhere from two to 12 hours before your bedtime. While you may think that a glass of wine or beer will help you fall asleep, alcohol can actually disrupt your sleep, so it's best to pass on the nightcap.

Create relaxing rituals that encourage you to unwind before bed. Whether it's soaking in a warm bath, reading a few chapters of a novel, or meditating, creating a consistent pre-bed routine can help you shed some of the day's stress (that can keep you up at night) and encourage your body and mind to unwind.

Get to the root of the problem. Insomnia or poor sleep can be a complicated issue caused by a series of factors. Medication, a physical condition—such as chronic pain, pregnancy, menopause, and restless leg

syndrome—as well as emotional or mental concerns—like depression, anxiety and stress—can all interfere with your ability to sleep. Signs of a sleep disorder may include:

- Frequent trouble falling asleep and/or trouble staying asleep throughout the night. Difficulty completing or focusing on day-to-day tasks. Feeling exhausted even after seven or eight hours of sleep.
- Frequent forgetfulness.
- Mood swings.
- Falling asleep while driving.

If one or more of these symptoms sound familiar, consult your health care professional right away.

One of the many ways to care for yourself is to get plenty of rest which, in turn, will help you to function at your best—at work, at school, and at home. Don't let poor sleep rob you of your efforts in self-care. By taking a few simple steps, understanding the source of any sleep disturbances, and getting the support of a medical professional when necessary, it is possible to make that dream of great sleep a reality.

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