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Tips to Improve How You Snooze

While researchers might continually debate its fundamental purpose, it doesn't take a scientist to recognize how much better you feel after a restful night's sleep! Increasing evidence suggests sleep is responsible for maintaining a healthy range of vital functions such as restoring damaged tissues, improving cognitive function and removing toxins from the brain. Likewise, sleeping too little or experiencing a lack of sleep can have negative, long-term health consequences, including a greater risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.



Strategies for Better Sleep

- **Sleep Environment** – The environment where you sleep should be dark, cool and quiet. A room temperature of 70 degrees or less is optimal. Associate your bedroom with sleep, not with activities such as television viewing, internet use or office work. White noise, such as that produced by a fan, might be beneficial.
- **Light** - Avoid exposure to bright light before sleeping, particularly blue light such as that emitted by electronic devices. Seek out 10 to 15 minutes of sunlight/natural light as early as possible after rising.
- **Sleep Position** - Sleeping on your back can worsen snoring and lead to poor quality sleep. The best sleep position is on your side.
- **Napping** - Do not nap within 5-7 hours of planning to go to sleep. A 30-40 minute nap is optimal.
- **Diet** - Avoid consuming caffeine within 4-6 hours before bedtime and eating 2-3 hours before sleeping. Foods high in tyramine, a substance naturally occurring in foods such as bacon, ham, pepperoni, eggplant, raspberries, avocados, nuts, soy sauce and red wine, also can interrupt sleep.
- **Nicotine** – Do not smoke 1-2 hours prior to bedtime. (Better still, don't smoke at all.)
- **Exercise** - Regular exercise can help you fall asleep more easily and lead to increased deep sleep. The best time to exercise is late afternoon or early evening. Avoid strenuous exercise within 3 hours of bedtime.
- **Routine** - Establish a pre-sleep routine 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime. Avoid stressful situations or issues related to work, finances etc. before sleeping.
- **Sleep Aids** - Melatonin can help you fall asleep, but will not lengthen sleep. Avoid long-term use.

Seeking Better Sleep? There's an App for That!

While technology offers many tools to help people with various aspects of life, it typically has a limit to which it can do so. The same holds true for smart phone apps that claim to "cure" insomnia. Although scientists recognize some of the benefits these apps can provide, most caution users that these are marketed as "entertainment" or "lifestyle" apps, not medical devices. This means their effectiveness has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. It also is important to check the permissions in the settings to see if the app collects unnecessary personal information.

Top Sleep-Aid Apps

- **Calm** – The Calm app is easy to use, and the "Sleep Stories" section offers bedtime stories for children and adults, read aloud by people with soothing voices, including celebrities like Matthew McConaughey. Only a few stories are included for free, but a subscription version unlocks an extensive library of meditations made specifically for sleep.
- **Sleep Time** - Sleep Time uses an accurate state-of-the-art algorithm to analyze sleep and provides comprehensive insights into your sleep patterns. The app monitors your movements over the course of the night and generates customized data of your sleep cycles in easy-to-read graphs and charts. Sleep Time's smart alarm learns to wake you during the perfect moment of your lightest sleep phase for ultimate revitalization.
- **Pillow** - Advanced sleep tracker and analysis alarm clock that monitors your slumber. Based on the most recent sleep research, Pillow's cutting-edge algorithm uses motion and sound-pattern detection to paint a complete picture of your sleep session. A comprehensive sleep-stage diagram plots the times you are awake and in the REM, light, and deep phases of sleep, as well as provides sleep session statistics.

Health, Safety and Sleep

Most people will acknowledge feeling and functioning better with a good night's sleep, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 35 percent of American adults get fewer than 7 hours sleep a night. The percentage jumps to 67 percent for high school students.

Not only do you feel worse when you have not had a good night's sleep, but sleep deprivation can be a major predictor of accidents and injuries among fatigued workers and employees. Decision-making is compromised, cognitive processes are slowed, and productivity is dramatically decreased.



Additional risks for sleep-deprived individuals:

- Impaired motor skills, including reduced hand-eye coordination, depth perception and balance
- Compromised decision making and risk taking
- Poor memory and information processing
- Falling asleep during the day, including in inconvenient places such as while on the job
- Decreased ability to deal with stress

Chronic sleep deprivation can also increase a person's risk for a number of chronic conditions:

- Obesity
- Worsening of diabetes and other disorders, such as epilepsy
- Heart disease
- Digestion and stomach problems
- Depression
- Certain cancers
- Reproductive problems
- Sleep disorders

The importance of getting a good night's sleep cannot be over-emphasized. You will feel much better and be more productive, safe and healthy in the long run.