

Recharge Your Life *With Sleep*

Simple, research-informed ways to support better sleep

Sleep changes throughout life. As we age, sleep can become lighter, our internal clock can shift, and nighttime awakenings may become more common.

But struggling with sleep doesn't necessarily mean you just have to live with it.

Research has identified several things that can support better sleep, and many of them happen long before your head hits the pillow.

01 Anchor Your Body Clock

Your body has an internal 24-hour clock called your circadian rhythm. One of the simplest ways to support it is to give your body clear signals about when it is day and when it is night.

- Waking at approximately the same time each day.
- Getting outside into natural light in the morning.
- Looking for opportunities for daylight throughout your day.
- Gradually dimming your environment in the evening.
- Making your bedroom dark at night.

Your mornings shape your nights: bright light during the day and darkness in the evening give your body the rhythm it's looking for.

02 Move Your Body

Exercise is increasingly recognized as an effective non-drug strategy for supporting better sleep. Research in older adults has found improvements with several types of movement, including:

- Walking
- Aerobic exercise
- Resistance and strength training
- Combined exercise
- Yoga

Newer research has found particularly encouraging results for strength and resistance training in older adults. You don't have to exercise specifically for sleep. Moving during the day may help you sleep at night.

03 Give Your Body a Landing Place

Sleep isn't an on/off switch. Create a little space between your active day and your sleeping night.

There isn't one perfect bedtime routine. Experiment with something that helps tell your body the day is done.

- Dim lights.
- A warm shower or bath.
- Reading.
- Slow breathing.
- Humming breathing.
- Gentle stretching.
- Prayer or meditation.
- Gratitude or loving-kindness.
- Writing down tomorrow's tasks so you don't have to carry them to bed.

04 Notice What's Getting in the Way

Before adding another supplement, ask: what might be getting in the way of my sleep?

Caffeine

Could you move it earlier in the day?

Alcohol

It may make you sleepy initially but can disrupt sleep later in the night.

Bright evening light

Could you dim your environment earlier?

Long or late naps

Could they be reducing your natural sleep pressure?

Too much time awake in bed

Has your bed become a place for scrolling, television, working, or worrying?

Sometimes improving sleep isn't about adding something new. It's about removing something that's interfering with what your body already knows how to do.

05 Help Your Brain Learn: Bed = Sleep

One of the most effective behavioral principles used in insomnia treatment is surprisingly simple: strengthen the connection between your bed and sleep.

- Go to bed when you're sleepy, rather than simply because the clock says it's bedtime.
- Keep activities such as working, scrolling and watching television out of bed when possible.
- If you find yourself lying awake and becoming increasingly frustrated, consider getting out of bed and doing something quiet in dim light.
- Return to bed when you feel sleepy again.
- Try not to repeatedly check the clock.

Still Struggling? Find Out Why.

Sometimes poor sleep isn't a habit that needs fixing. Something may be interfering with your sleep. Consider talking with a healthcare professional if you experience:

- Persistent difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- Loud snoring, choking or gasping during sleep.
- Significant daytime sleepiness.
- Morning headaches.
- Uncomfortable or restless legs at night.
- Frequent nighttime urination.
- Pain or reflux that wakes you.
- Hot flashes or night sweats.
- A significant change in sleep after starting a medication.

Sleep apnea is particularly important to consider as we age. In women, sleep apnea doesn't always look like the classic picture of loud snoring and extreme daytime sleepiness. Sometimes the complaint is simply poor sleep, frequent awakenings, fatigue or insomnia.

When Sleep Has Become a Struggle

If sleep has become an ongoing problem, there is an evidence-based treatment worth knowing about: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I).

CBT-I is considered a first-line treatment for chronic insomnia. It goes beyond basic sleep hygiene and uses behavioral and cognitive strategies to help retrain sleep. Research also shows that digital CBT-I programs can be effective, including for older adults.

VA Insomnia Coach

Insomnia Coach is a free app developed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs based on principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia. Despite being developed by the VA, it was created for everyone, not just Veterans.

- A guided 5-week training plan.
- A sleep diary.
- Personalized sleep feedback.
- Sleep education.
- Tools for relaxation and getting sleep back on track.

Learn more and download: [VA Insomnia Coach](#)

If you have sleep apnea, restless legs, bipolar disorder, seizures, significant daytime sleepiness, sleepwalking, night terrors or increased fall risk, talk with a healthcare professional before beginning a self-directed insomnia program.

Want Professional Help?

You can also work with a healthcare professional who specializes in Behavioral Sleep Medicine or CBT-I. The Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine (SBSM) maintains directories of professionals trained in behavioral sleep medicine.

Find a provider: [SBSM Provider Directory](#)

Prefer virtual care? [SBSM Telemedicine Directory](#)

Telemedicine can make it possible to work with a sleep specialist even when there isn't one located nearby.

One Small Experiment

You don't have to overhaul your life tonight. Choose one thing to experiment with.

- Get outside tomorrow morning.
- Take a walk.
- Add some strength training to your week.
- Move your coffee earlier.
- Skip the evening drink and notice what happens.
- Dim the lights tonight.
- Try a few slow breaths.
- Go to bed when you're actually sleepy.

Then pay attention.

What helps?

What doesn't?

What is your body trying to tell you?

*Better sleep often isn't about trying harder, it's about
creating the conditions that allow sleep to happen.*

REFERENCES

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For educational purposes only. This resource shares general information from sleep research and is not intended to diagnose or treat insomnia or another sleep disorder. Individual needs vary.