



Feeling crabby lately? It could be you are not getting enough sleep. Although the average adult needs seven to nine hours of sleep a night, that number could be hard to come by if you factor in work, taking care of children and managing a household.

Then there are the unexpected challenges that can keep you up at night: financial worries, layoffs, illness or relationship issues.

Compounding the problem is the fact that if you do not get the rest you need, you will find it even harder to deal with the stresses causing your sleep problems to begin with.

Grumpiness is not the only result of sleep deprivation. Getting too little sleep impairs memory, reaction time and alertness. Tired people are less productive at work, less patient with others and less interactive in relationships.

Sleep deprivation can also be dangerous. A large number of vehicles crashes each year are due to drivers falling asleep at the wheel.

Here are some tips offering to help you achieve restful sleep. You do not have to use every tip on the list. What works for one person does not always work for another.

Try one or two of the following tips or a combination until you have enough quality sleep to feel alert and well rested. If these tips do not work, see your doctor. You could have a sleep disorder, such as obstructive sleep apnea, that requires medical attention.

1. Stick to a schedule, and do not sleep late on weekends. Instead, go to bed and get up at about the same time every day.

You better do not need to rely on an alarm clock to wake up when you get enough sleep.

2. Do not eat or drink a lot before bedtime. Eat a light dinner about two hours before sleeping. If you drink too much liquid before sleeping, you will wake up repeatedly in the night for trips to the bathroom.

Do not eat spicy or fatty foods. They can cause heartburn, which may interfere with your sleep.

If you get the bedtime munchies, eat something that triggers serotonin, which makes you sleepy. Carbohydrates (bread or cereal) or foods containing the amino acid L-tryptophan (milk, tuna, or turkey) will do the trick.

Do not drink alcohol near bedtime. It may cause you to wake up repeatedly, to snore, and it may exacerbate sleep apnea.

3. Avoid caffeine and nicotine. They are addictive stimulants and keep you awake. Smokers often experience withdrawal symptoms at night, and smoking in bed can be dangerous. Caffeine should be avoided for eight hours before your desired bedtime.

4. Exercise. If you are trying to sleep better, the best time to exercise is in the afternoon. A program of regular physical activity enhances the quality of nocturnal sleep.

5. A slightly cool room is ideal for sleeping. This mimics your internal temperature drop during sleep, so turn off the heat and save on fuel bills.

If you tend to get cold, use blankets. Try sleeping in warmer nightclothes and wear socks.

If you overheat at night, wear light nightclothes and sleep under a single sheet. Use an air conditioner or fan to keep the room cool.

Use a dehumidifier if you are bothered by moist air. Use a humidifier if you are bothered by dry air. Signs and symptoms of dry air irritation include a sore throat, nosebleeds and a dry throat.

6. Sleep primarily at night. Daytime naps steal hours from nighttime slumber. Limit daytime sleep to less than one hour, no later than 3 p.m.

If you work nights, keep your window coverings closed so that sunlight, which interferes with the body's internal clock, does not interrupt your sleep.

If you have a day job and sleep at night, but you still have trouble waking up, leave the window coverings open and let the sunlight wake you up.

7. Keep it quiet. Silence is more conducive to sleep. Turn off the radio and TV. Use earplugs or a fan or some other source of constant, soothing, background noise to mask sounds you cannot control, such as a busy street, trains, airplanes or even a snoring partner. Double-pane windows and heavy curtains also muffle outside noise.

8. Make your bed. A good bed is subjective and different for each person. Make sure you have a bed that is comfortable and offers orthopedic comfort.

If you share your bed, make sure there is enough room for two. Children and pets are often disruptive, so you may need to set limits on how often they sleep in your bed with you. Use your bed only for sleep and sex.

9. Go to bed when you are tired and turn out the lights. If you do not fall asleep in 30 minutes, get up and do something else. Go back to bed when you are tired.

10. Do not agonise over falling asleep. The stress will only prevent sleep.

11. Soak and sack out. Taking a hot shower or bath before bed helps bring on sleep because they can relax tense muscles.

12. Do not rely on sleeping pills. Check with your doctor before using sleeping pills. Doctors generally recommend using sleeping pills for up to four weeks. Make sure the pills will not interact with other medications or with an existing medical condition. If you do take a sleep medication, reduce the dosage gradually when you want to quit.

13. Use the lowest dosage, and never mix alcohol and sleeping pills.

If you feel sleepy or dizzy during the day, talk to your doctor about changing the dosage or discontinuing the pills.

Determine the quality of your sleep

Insomnia: the inability to get enough sleep may only last a night or it can last for weeks, months, years or even a lifetime. If you have any of the following signs and symptoms, you may not be getting enough sleep:

1. You routinely ignore your alarm clock or snatch a few extra minutes to snooze before getting up.

2. You look forward to catching up on your sleep on the weekends.

3. You have to fight to stay awake during long meetings, in overheated rooms or after a heavy meal.

4. You are irritable with co-workers, family and friends.

5. You have difficulty concentrating or remembering.

6. It takes you more than 30 minutes to fall asleep at night.

7. You wake repeatedly throughout the night.

8. You wake up groggy and not well rested.

9. Your spouse or partner complains about your snoring or fitful sleeping.

10. You feel tired during the day, even after a full night's sleep.

11. You have frequent urination at night.

12. You have difficulty falling asleep.

13. You feel fatigued during the day.

14. You feel irritable or have mood swings.

15. You feel confused or have difficulty concentrating.

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