

13 scientifically proven ways to sleep better

<https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-fall-asleep-and-improve-sleep-2016-6?amp>

More than a third of Americans [don't get the seven to nine hours of sleep](#) a night that the CDC recommends. Some people think they can function on less, but usually that's because the [sleep-deprived brain loses the ability to tell when it isn't functioning right](#) after just a few nights of short sleep.

Getting better sleep can [change your life in powerful ways](#). Simple, everyday adjustments may be all that some people require for better sleep, but there are also things that true insomniacs can do to soothe sleep troubles.

Tech Insider has reviewed a number of studies and [interviewed sleep experts](#) to figure out how to best transform your sleep habits. Here are 13 science-backed tips.

1. Figure out how much sleep you really need.

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Our daily schedule while we're working is often anything but natural. It ignores our individual chronotype (whether we're night owls or morning people) and forces us onto a societal instead of individual sleep schedule. Plus, anxiety can make natural sleep difficult.

So the next time you have a few days off, go to sleep when you are tired and see how long you naturally sleep — you need a few days for your body to relax and tell you your needs. Most likely, you'll find yourself sleeping seven to nine hours.

Take a look at your other habits too. Do you normally watch TV right until you want to get into bed? Do you give yourself any time to get ready for sleep before you actually want to be asleep? Do you do eat or drink anything late at night? You can't change habits until you are aware of what you are already doing.

2. Pick a bedtime.

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Don't try to go to bed "as early as possible" — that's a vague goal, [which makes it](#) almost impossible to achieve. Instead, plan ahead.

Do you want to be up by 7:00? Did your vacation experiment show you that you really need eight hours, not six? Then get in bed by 11:00, if not a little before. Try to stick to your bedtime as closely as possible, even on weekends. But don't freak out if you change your routine every so often. Exceptions are okay.

3. Set some rules for the future.

Work and sleep shouldn't need to happen in the same place! [Scott Wintrow/Getty](#)

Since you've already taken note of your habits, you can now start re-building your bedtime routine to train yourself to sleep. Set rules that will help you relax. Maybe dim the lights and turn off the TV an hour before bed.

One big one: never do anything work-related in bed, including checking your email or social media accounts. If you associate your bed with work, it'll be *much* harder to relax there. That old advice about [reserving your bed for sleep and sex](#) is pretty solid — even if [9 out of 10 Americans ignore it](#) — but really, just make sure you don't do anything in bed that isn't relaxing.

4. Don't eat or drink alcohol right before bed.

[Melia Robinson/Business Insider](#)

Eating too soon before sleeping is associated with heartburn, which can ruin a night. And even though a nightcap is tempting and might help you fall asleep at first, people who drink a lot before bed usually [experience disruptions](#) to their sleep in the second half of the night. The more time you can give yourself between partying and feasting and sleeping, the better your rest will be overall.

5. Put your smartphone and laptop away at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

Stop. [m01229/flickr](#)

This is advice that people love to ignore, but [there are very good reasons for it](#). The blue light from your phone mimics the brightness of the sun, which tells your brain to stop producing melatonin, an essential hormone that regulates your circadian rhythm and tells your body when it's time to wake and when it's time to sleep.

Disruptions to your circadian rhythm are not only linked to poor sleep, they're also connected to [vision problems](#), [cancer](#), and [depression](#). Put the damn phone away.

6. Spend 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime relaxing.

[Moyan Brenn](#)

Here are a few recommendations [from the National Sleep Foundation](#) and a few other sources:

- Read a book or magazine you enjoy — just make sure it's not work related.
- Write your thoughts down. Experts say journaling at night can help manage stress and anxiety, making it easier for you to drift off. Spending [a few minutes writing in a journal](#) is associated with more productive workdays, less stress, fewer symptoms of depression, and more.
- Create a hygiene ritual that sends a psychological signal that you are getting ready for bed. Brush your teeth, wash your face, floss.
- Try meditation. Studies show that mindfulness meditation lowers stress and [promotes psychological well-being](#). If you want something that will send you to sleep, the [UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center](#) has a [selection of free downloadable meditations](#), including one specifically designed to be done in bed.

7. In the a.m., don't hit snooze.

[cdw9](#)

Experts say that drifting back off will only leave you groggier [if you fall into a deeper sleep](#) and it'll take even longer for you to feel fully awake.

8. Get some exercise and in particular, some sun, early on.

[Flickr / Living Fitness](#)

It'll wake you up and that early morning exposure to sunlight will shut off melatonin production, [priming your body](#) to start producing it again the next night, when you are getting ready for bed.

But an afternoon workout [can help you sleep](#) too, just don't do it too late.

These tips will help most people, but they don't work for everyone. Fortunately, experts also have some suggestions for eliminating true insomnia.

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If you've ever lay there awake in bed, getting increasingly agitated because you know that you're going to be exhausted the next day after yet another night with little to no sleep, you know it's incredibly disheartening and frustrating.

But there are particular strategies that experts say can help with sleepless nights, even when things feel particularly rough.

9. Stop freaking out about sleep.

[Rebecca Siegel/Flickr](#)

Easier said than done, sure.

But people who start to face the night with dread and stare at their clocks until it's time to get up start to develop negative emotions like fear, anxiety, and anger that they associate with trying to sleep. That can lead to chronic insomnia.

Stimulus-control therapy seeks to break those associations, so you simply associate bed with sleep and not all that extra baggage. Doctors recommending this approach will suggest things like not keeping a clock in bedroom and not lying in bed when you can't sleep.

The Ohio Sleep Medicine Institute [recommends](#) that "patients should not 'catastrophize' when faced with a 'bad night.'" Instead of worrying about how awful your day is going to be because you are tired, realize that you may be better able to sleep the next night because of it.

10. Practice relaxation.

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When you're anxious about being unable to sleep, your body produces stress hormones that make it harder to let go of that anxiety.

[Training yourself](#) to relax using a technique like progressive muscle relaxation (individually focusing on relaxing every part of your body in sequence) or meditation can help. Tech Insider's Rafi Letzter calls the sleep meditations on the [Buddhify app](#) "the first good solution" he's found for chronic insomnia.

11. Change how you think about sleep.

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This is a two-part strategy. The cognitive part includes changing people's beliefs about their insomnia. In many cases, people who are stressed about their inability to sleep tend to exaggerate the problem, thinking they've slept even less than they actually have. Changing these negative thoughts can reduce some of the distress.

For altering behavior, experts recommend combining both the relaxation training and stimulus control therapy described above. Creating an environment conducive to sleep, like a cool dark quiet room, can help too.

12. If you can't sleep, get out of bed.

Maybe you'll even doze off on the couch. [Flickr/DieselDemon](#)

This strategy is simple — if you can't sleep, don't lie in bed and try to fall asleep.

If you've been trying for more than 20 minutes, get out of bed and go do something else. Don't use your computer, phone, or watch TV though — those can all make sleep problems worse.

Experts say that staying out of bed when you can't sleep helps break the cycle of linking your bed with negative emotions. Plus, the mild sleep deprivation this causes could make it easier to sleep the next day.

13. Stop trying to go to sleep.

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As funny as this may sound, the [trick to falling asleep](#) might be trying to stay awake.

By lying in bed content to be awake and not worrying about falling asleep, insomniacs have been shown to actually fall asleep more quickly and sleep better. Experts say this is because trying to stay awake (without looking at phones or computers and just doing nothing) removes the anxiety people can feel while trying to fall asleep.