

HELPFUL IDEAS TO IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP

Getting enough good quality sleep on a regular basis is [important for our health](#) and well-being in many ways. Sleep supports physical and emotional health and brain function. Not getting enough sleep over time can raise your risk for [adverse health conditions](#), including heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression. Lack of sleep can also affect your energy, focus, productivity, safety, and relationships with others. In children and teens, sleep is especially important as it helps support growth and development.

Unfortunately, about [30% of U.S. adults](#) have trouble getting the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep each night. According to the [National Center for Health Statistics](#), this includes about 15% of adults who have trouble falling asleep and about 18% who have trouble staying asleep.

In addition to getting enough sleep each night, [experts](#) say the stages of your sleep are also important. There are [four sleep stages](#), including one for rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and three that form non-REM (NREM) sleep. Because each stage offers important health benefits, understanding the stages can help you understand your sleep and sleep challenges.

To get enough, good quality sleep, including all four stages, [experts](#) suggest several strategies. These are part of what's often called good "sleep hygiene."

1. **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on the weekends. If your work, family, and other responsibilities allow, set your schedule so that you can get seven to nine hours of sleep daily.
2. **Wind down.** Create a relaxing bedtime routine, which may involve reading, stretching, a warm bath, or other calming activities. Avoid anything that causes excitement or stress just before bed, from a hard conversation to an intense television show.
3. **Use light to your advantage.** To manage your circadian rhythms (your body's internal clock), expose yourself to daylight in the morning and throughout the day. At night, avoid bright light and blue light from electronic devices like phones, computers, and tablets.

4. **Avoid caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes, or heavy meals in the evening.** All of these can disrupt your sleep. Try not to drink a lot of any liquid before bed (including water) as the need to urinate, during the night, can interrupt your sleep.
5. **Prep your room for sleep.** Make your room cool, dark, and quiet. Try blackout curtains, eye masks, ear plugs, white noise machines, humidifiers, or fans.
6. **Exercise daily.** Try to get physical exercise every day. However, try to avoid exercising (anything more than stretching) when you are winding down to sleep.
7. **Seek help if you need it.** If you have ongoing trouble sleeping, speak with your doctor or a sleep specialist. They may recommend a sleep study or testing for underlying health conditions that can cause sleep problems, such as hormonal changes, sleep apnea, or an overactive thyroid.

Those who have to work through the night and need to sleep during the day face even more challenges in getting quality sleep. Our bodies have an internal clock that helps to regulate functions such as body temperature, hunger, and hormone levels. This clock is set by our exposure to sunlight. So, when we try to stay awake at night and sleep during the day, it can disrupt these natural rhythms. This makes it more challenging to get the quality sleep our bodies need to reset.

If you are someone who works at night and needs to sleep during the day, here are more things you can do to help ensure you get the best sleep possible:

1. **Sleep in a dark space.** Exposure to sunlight will make it more difficult to fall asleep so when you get home, try to go to sleep as soon as possible in a dark room or use a sleep mask that covers your eyes.
2. **Avoid heavy meals while on the night shift.** Your digestive system is less efficient at night because it slows down to allow digestive tissues to repair and grow. Lighter snacks during your night shift can help you sleep more soundly.
3. **Set boundaries.** Ensure anyone you may live with is aware of your sleep schedule so they know when you will be sleeping and can help create the environment you need to be able to sleep. Tools that create “white noise” can also help with daytime sleep.

These well-studied sleep habits and strategies can help you achieve [Whole Health](#) — health of your Mind, Body, Spirit, and Community.



In “[Night After Night](#),” one of TakeCare’s short films, Jane overcomes nearly 70 years of insomnia by consulting a sleep expert and trying a range of strategies. As she says, “Things are dramatically better. You don’t give up. You’ve got to keep trying.” [Hear Jane’s story](#) as you make healthy sleep part of your Whole Health journey.