



# 25 Tips for a Better Night's Sleep

ZQuiet.

# Introduction

When you sleep well, you live well. You are more energized, more focused, and more productive. You are also healthier in both mind and body. Your relationship with yourself and with those around you improves because your mood is better and your stress level is lower.

That said, getting good sleep can be hard. As you age, your quality of sleep often declines. You may find it difficult to fall asleep because of an active mind filled with daily stressors. Your sleep may be interrupted -- by children, a pet, a snoring bed partner, chronic pain, or a medical condition.

Take the time and a few simple steps to create an environment for good, quality sleep and you will reap the rewards. Sleep well, live well.



## Quality Sleep (7 – 9 Hours)

- Restores energy and revitalizes all major organs
- Regulates hormones to control moods, appetite and manage stress
- Contributes to good immune system function
- Maintains memory and promotes cognitive function
- Makes you feel good
- Helps sustain energy throughout the day
- Allows you to take advantage of life's opportunities

## Lack of Sleep/ Poor Quality Sleep

- Decreased productivity
- Depression
- Decreased immune function
- Decreased mental functioning
- Increased risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes †
- Poor decision making
- Job accidents, traffic accidents\*
- Increased irritability
- Weight gain

\*driving while drowsy is conservatively estimated to cause 100,000 crashes, 71,000 injuries and 1,500 traffic deaths per year according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

# ZQuiet's Top 25 Ways to a Better Night's Sleep

## 1. Avoid or minimize your use of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and OTC medications that contain stimulants.

**Caffeine:** Some drugs, such as caffeine, block important sleep-inducing mechanisms in the body, and therefore prevent falling and staying asleep. Be sure to read labels carefully as caffeine can hide in over-the-counter medications like aspirin, in soda (even non-cola flavors), "energy" drinks and bars, candies, chocolate, and tea. Caffeine is absorbed in less than 15 minutes, and it can take hours for your body to expel this "stay awake" drug.

**Nicotine:** This is also a stimulant that not only disturbs sleep, but causes more light sleep and less of the necessary deep restorative sleep. Also, the need for a cigarette may awaken smokers earlier, further reducing their sleep.

**Alcohol:** Even though alcohol is a depressant, research shows that alcohol can rob you of valuable sleep. While a nightcap may help you sleep deeper initially, it causes sleeplessness later in the night.

**2. Maintain healthy weight.** During sleep, the hormones ghrelin and leptin, come to a restorative balance so that when you awaken, they can help regulate appetite. Lack of adequate sleep can disrupt this process, which then can cause increased appetite and contribute to weight gain.

**3. Avoid large meals close to bedtime.** Heavy meals can prevent restful sleep since active digestion revs up the stomach, pancreas, and

the gastrointestinal tract. Try to finish eating 2-3 hours before bedtime. This will allow enough time for your food to be adequately digested so your body can relax comfortably for sleep.

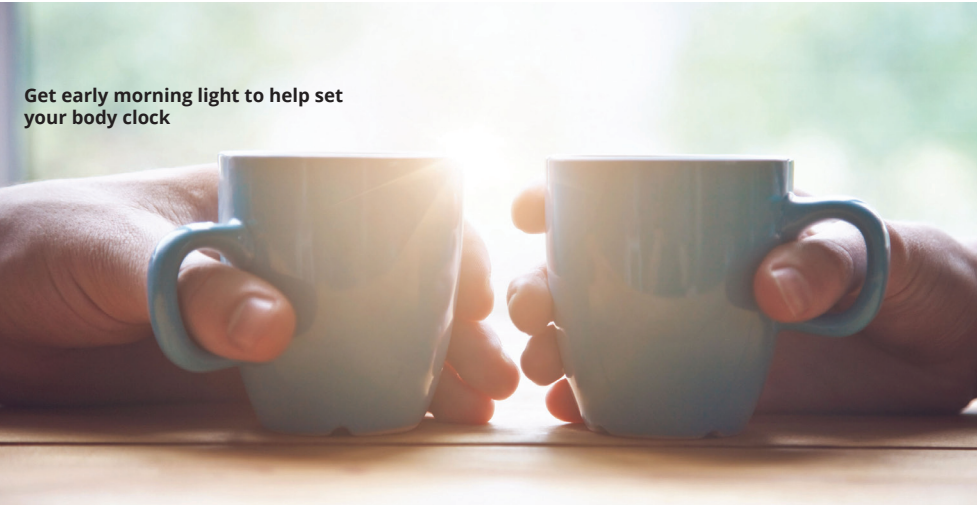
**4. Exercise daily.** Exercise has many positive health and sleep benefits. Besides helping with weight control, exercise can release natural "happy" chemicals in the brain (endorphins) associated with good mood and stress relief. Exercise raises the body's core temperature, so finish exercising 3-6 hours before bedtime to allow time for the core temperature to drop to sleep compatible levels. Early morning exercise is a great way to set your body clock while controlling weight and relieving stress.



Exercise daily

**5. Get early morning light to help set your body clock.** Humans are diurnal, which means they are naturally awake and alert during the day and sleepy at night. The sleep process is regulated, in part, by circadian rhythm, a 24-hour cycle of physical, mental, and behavioral changes driven by our biological clock, regulated in our brain and influenced by the amount of light in the environment. The brain – which serves as the body's master clock – releases the hormone melatonin in response to the amount of light we see. When there is less light, more melatonin is released; so we tend to be sleepy at night and awake during the day. Spend some time getting early morning light (before 9 a.m.) by sitting near a window or going outside to prepare your body for good sleep 16 hours later.

**Get early morning light to help set your body clock**



**6. Have a sleep routine that begins to prepare the body for sleep 10-30 minutes in advance.** Children are not the only ones who benefit from a bedtime routine. Having a night-time ritual to prepare your body for sleep not only makes sleep a priority but begins the winding down process that encourages sleep. Thirty minutes before bedtime do things such as: dim the lights, shut down the computer (light from the computer screen can stimulate the brain), take a warm bath, read a book or listen to soothing music to calm both body and mind.

**7. Go to sleep and awaken on a regular schedule.** While a late night on occasion is fine, maintaining a fairly regular schedule during the week and on weekends contributes to better sleep. Once you've determined how many hours of sleep you personally need to feel rested, add in your bedtime ritual preparation time, then choose the best time to go to bed and stick to it. You can then sleep peacefully and awaken without an alarm clock. Remember to adjust your sleep needs to accommodate life events and circumstances. For example we sleep more when starting new jobs, under great stress, recovering from illness or injury, grieving, or when sleep deprived for any reason.

**8. Avoid shift work that changes from day to night shifts within the same week/month.** Because we have a biological clock and circadian rhythms that control our body functions and systems, a constantly shifting sleep schedule due to split-shift work can be very disruptive. While economic realities sometimes demand such a schedule, moving to a regular schedule as quickly as possible will go a long way toward optimizing both good sleep and good health.



**9. Take daytime naps.** Napping for adults spurs a bit of controversy among sleep experts. Some sources suggest napping up to 90 minutes per day while others suggest no more than 20-40 minutes. Other experts recommend going for a walk when afternoon slump happens to avoid napping completely. Personal preference, and the amount of sleep disturbance a nap does or does not cause, should determine how many naps to take and for how long. Discuss consistent daytime sleepiness with your medical professional since it could be a symptom of a larger medical or emotional problem.



Take daytime naps

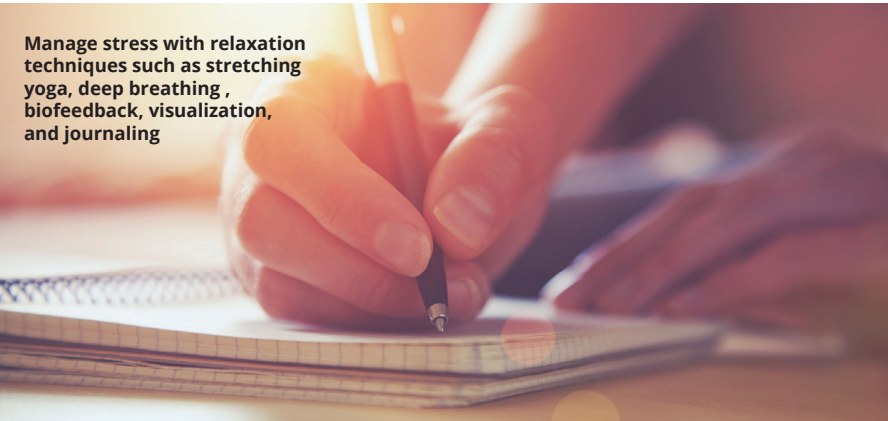
**10. Avoid excessive consumption of liquids late in the evening.** Overconsumption of liquids contributes to the need for a bathroom break in the middle of the night. Once awake, some people have a difficult time returning to sleep. The simplest solution is to avoid large amounts of liquids close to bedtime. Limit intake to one cup of fluid within four hours of bedtime.

**11. Make sleep a priority but don't obsess over occasional wakefulness.** If you're taking the necessary steps to make sleep a priority then an occasional night of interrupted sleep is not a cause for worry. Travel, anxiety, illness, guests, children and/or grandchildren, injury, and a whole host of other events or circumstances can cause occasional sleeplessness. Rules for sleeping should not be set in stone. Life is for enjoyment and experiencing fully! If your enjoyment occasionally disrupts your sleep, go with the flow, take a nap or go to bed early the following day and let it go.

**12. Avoid middle-of-the-night clock watching.** Knowing how much sleep you actually lost won't help you the next day. On the occasion when you are awake in the middle of the night, avoid checking the clock, which can add to worry about not getting enough sleep and extend your sleeplessness. Instead, take care of any bodily needs (food, drink, pain) and then make a conscious decision to sleep. Attempt to keep your mind clear or imagine yourself in a calm place while you focus on the feeling of relaxing as you wait for sleep to return.

**13. Manage stress with relaxation techniques such as stretching, yoga, deep breathing, biofeedback, visualization, and journaling.** Anxiety/stress is one of the biggest sleep robbers. A brain racing

with thoughts and emotions can create a tense body that resists sleep. Relaxation techniques such as deep, mindful breathing, visualization, stretching, yoga or other kinds of conscious muscle relaxation techniques can be useful for quieting the mind and relaxing the body. While anxiety often inhibits libido, sex is also a good relaxation technique because physical contact lowers cortisol levels and releases feel-good hormones like endorphins. Orgasm also releases more endorphins plus another feel-good hormone, oxytocin, which acts like a sedative. Plus, the physicality of the sexual encounter also relaxes muscles, making sleep easier.



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**14. Write your worries down.** If worry is what is keeping you awake at night, take a few minutes before bed to write down your biggest worries along with possible solutions that you can explore the following day,

then consciously let that worry go. Keep a pad of paper next to your bed to write down worries that awaken you in the middle of the night so you can let them go, too. Then know that your subconscious mind will help find solutions to the problems with which your conscious mind is struggling. We cannot control all the circumstances of our lives, but we can control how we react to them. Letting go and trusting in life is easier said than done, but worth the effort.

**15. If possible, have emotionally charged discussions during daytime hours when there is more time for resolution. Not every situation demands an immediate solution.** Sometimes a good night's sleep puts a relationship issue or emotionally charged problem into perspective by morning. While it is not always possible to deal with emotionally charged situations at a chosen time, sometimes the outcome is more beneficial when we sleep on it and can tackle it when we are clearheaded from a good night's sleep.

**16. Go with the flow if creative inspiration calls.** For creative types who awaken at 3 a.m. with inspiration, sometimes it is better to simply get up, expend your creative energy until it's exhausted by jotting down ideas, painting, sketching, or another creative expression. Then return to bed to sleep and wake naturally. If that is not possible, get up at your normal time and then go to bed early the following night.

**17. Maintain a good bed - not too soft, not too hard.** The firmness of your mattress is a personal preference. Choose a bed that supports your body comfortably so you will minimize tossing and turning. Shop for mattresses by comfort knowing that the highest price mattress is not necessarily the most comfortable. Also, personal comfort is the most

important factor in choosing a pillow, but remember that a pillow that raises the head too high can interfere with breathing.

**18. Avoid stomach sleeping.** To accommodate easy breathing, stomach sleepers must turn their heads and necks to the side, straining the muscles and ligaments of the neck and spine. Stomach sleepers, according to some chiropractors, are putting undue stress on their necks and spines and setting themselves up for back problems.

**19. Set up your bedroom for sleep.** Part of making sleep a priority is to have a space dedicated to sleeping. A bedroom should not be an office, entertainment space, or a gym. Remove computers, televisions, and exercise equipment from the bedroom if possible.

**20. Do not keep electronics and/or blue light in the bedroom.** Short wave blue light and electro-magnetism from electronic equipment may disturb sleep. Remove televisions, digital video recorders, computers, cell phones, and digital clocks with blue numbers from bedrooms.

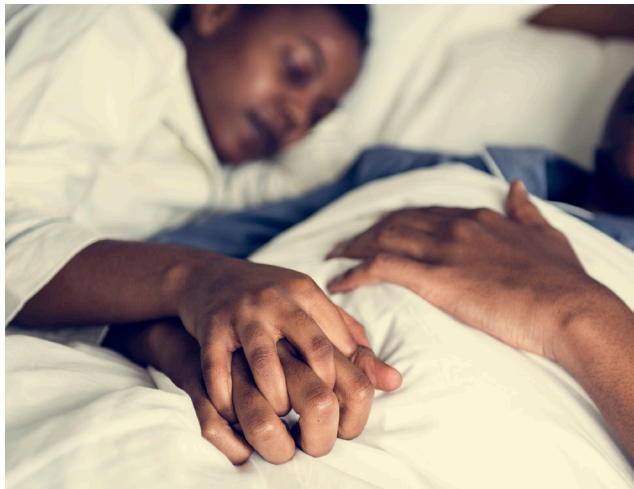
**21. Keep the bedroom dark room.** Keep rooms dark for best quality sleep. If necessary, use eye pillows or masks. Use only low-level night lights if night lights are needed. Do not use the television as a night light.

**22. Keep the bedroom quiet.** While some

people can fall asleep anywhere, most people require a quiet space for sleeping, which is not always possible in urban or noisy environments. Using a fan for white noise can cover many sounds and also has the added benefit of circulating air.

**23. Maintain a good sleeping temperature.** Most experts agree that a cool room is a better environment for sleep. A bedroom should be no warmer than 68 degrees and have adequate ventilation. If you're using a fan for white noise, avoid having the air blow on your neck.

**24. Make sure your bed is large enough for you and your partner.** Spooning before sleep is a nice way to get warm and cozy for sleep but too much closeness can interrupt sleep. Ensure your bed has enough room for you and your partner and any little people who may join you. Avoid sleeping with pets on your bed.



**25. Create a cozy sleep space by using sleep inducing aromas, eye pillows, adequate linens.** One way to ensure relaxation is to have a cozy bedroom geared for sleep. Use aromas like lavender, known for its sleep inducing scent, keep an eye pillow nearby to ensure darkness, and have comfortable bed linens. When asleep, the core body temperature drops, so make sure your blankets or comforters keep you warm.



## Summary

The quality of each new day depends on the previous night's sleep, and a good night's sleep means more than just getting rest. Taking some simple steps to reduce sleeplessness can improve health and bring balance and wellbeing in your life. Sweet Dreams!

**Editors note:** Sleep disturbance can be a sign of more serious health concerns. If consistent sleeplessness persists, be sure to consult your doctor.

**Resources:** National Sleep Foundation, Bastyr University, WebMD, Discovery Health, National Center for PTSD, National Institute for Health, Sleep.com, Michael J. Breus MD, Center for Sleep Research, Sleep Research Society, Better Sleep Council, Prevention.com, Whitaker Wellness Institute, Mayo Clinic, University of Michigan

**About the author:** Barbara Mulvey Little is a Seattlebased writer-editor who has personally needed to use many of these tips.

Make sure your bed is large enough for you and your partner



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