

Tips to Improve Sleep

We're all different. Finding the right combination of elements, as you can imagine, requires quite a bit of self experimentation. For the most part, a good night's sleep boils down to managing five things well: time in bed, stress and mental activity, a consistent routine (exercise, bedtime routine etc), creating an environment that is conducive to sleep, and, of course, diet.

Here are some tips and resources to help you fall asleep and stay asleep more easily.

- 1. Track your sleep:** The first order of business is to establish a baseline and track your sleep with a journal or a free app like [SleepCycle](#) (place it under your bed sheet and it monitors your breathing patterns).
- 2. Sleep in total darkness:** Because of our circadian rhythms, the presence of light prior to sleeping signals the body to limit the production of melatonin. Not only does it disrupt sleep, but it also poses some [health risks](#). So get rid of or cover up your electronics, install blackout curtains or sleep with an eye mask.
- 3. Get rid of the “blue light”:** Too much exposure to light before bedtime is one of the biggest culprits of sleep struggles. “Blue lights” in particular (as opposed to the “red light” of fires and candles) [mess with your body's ability](#) to produce melatonin. Starting 60-90 minutes before bed, avoid or limit the usage of tablets, smartphones, TVs, computers, clock radios and other blue light emitting devices. Even better, get them out of your bedroom. This sounds inconvenient, but there are a lot of blue light blocking devices and apps that help combat this, which you can see [here](#).
- 4. Keep your room cool:** The ideal temperature for falling and staying asleep is somewhere between 65 and 70 degrees, the cooler the better. Studies show that cooler body temperatures lead to more deep sleep, where as hot environments and higher body temperatures lead to more wakeful states.

5. Adjust your sound: Sound frequencies can actually alter brainwaves and influence the body's functioning (mainly because the [neurons in our brains](#) use electricity to communicate with each other), and there has been a lot of data to suggest that we can achieve more periods of deep sleep if we listen to certain "binaural beats" aka brainwave entertainment. A simple white noise app will suffice, or for the more adventurous, a special binaural deep sleep inducing track.

6. Clear your mind: This is a great time for a little introspection so that your day ends on a positive note:

- Say a prayer
- Write down the things you accomplished during the day
- Write down the things you're grateful for
- Meditate
- Get thoughts, ideas and problems out of your head with a journaling session (especially helpful if you're the type to lie in bed rehashing all of things in your head.)

7. Don't drink caffeine after 2pm: Caffeine is a stimulant and has sleep disrupting effects.

8. Don't drink alcohol: But if you do, have your cocktails earlier in the evening and not right before bed (hooray for happy hour!) – because while alcohol might help you fall asleep, it lessens the amount of time you spend in REM sleep. This likely explains my above sleep chart – I usually pour myself a glass of wine or two once the kids are asleep, which, as it turns out, is too late.

9. What you should take before bed: There are dozens of supplements and minerals that are known to enhance sleep. The more popular ones include:

- Magnesium (if you're a female experiencing night sweats, magnesium is worth trying) in the form of vitamins, lotion or even an epsom salt bath/foot bath
- Melatonin
- Chamomile tea
- A teaspoon of raw honey
- Lavender lotion or essential oils

10. Create a bedtime routine: Our bodies like predictability. They'll work better when you sleep and rise at the same time. The key here is to start winding down at least 30 minutes before bed, getting your brain into a more restful state, and to find what group of activities benefit you the most.

11. If you can't sleep, get up: If you are not able to fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed. Read or journal under a dim light. Dense fiction will surely put you to sleep quickly.

Sleep Aids, Gadgets & Resources

TRACKERS & ALARM CLOCKS

- [Sleep Cycle](#): This is a free, easy to use app that tracks your sleep by monitoring your breathing. Place your phone (on airplane mode) face down under your fitted sheet near the corner of your bed, and measure your sleep length and quality.
- [Philips Wakeup Light Clock](#): This clock simulates sunrise, gradually increasing approximately 30 minutes before your alarm time, so that you can prepare your body to wake up. It also has a dimmer to send you off to sleep.

LIGHT & DARK

- [F.lux](#): Install this free software on your computer which will adjust the color of your screen depending on the time of day. At night, it will display a significantly softer, red glow which, after several months of use, I have come to very much appreciate.
- [Black-out shade liners](#): These curtain liners from Bed, Bath & Beyond attach to the inside of your curtains, blocking out light and sound. They come in sets of two, but each panel is only 30 inches wide. If you sign up for their mailing list, you'll be eligible to receive 20% off one item.
- [Sleep mask](#): I personally do not sleep with a mask (I rip it off in the middle of the night) but this one seems to be the most frequently recommended because it completely blocks out light. And it comes with earplugs.
- [Low Blue NightLight](#): This is the nightlight I have in my kids room to create a warmer, softer atmosphere (post on kids coming next week, stay tuned!)
- [Himalayan Salt Lamp](#): Salt lamps work as air purifiers and light therapy, and they're nice to look at. I keep one in my room and cozy up to it at night to read.
- [Screen filters](#): It's a goofy looking site, but it has everything you need to "naturally maximize melatonin" and minimize the blue light at night, specifically for your phone, tablet and TV screens.
- [Blue light blocking glasses](#): I wear these at night (when I remember) and I really like how the world looks at night through them. They are inexpensive at under \$8, but they are uncomfortable and I do feel silly wearing them.
- [NaturePlus Light Therapy Lamp](#): While I have not tried light therapy, there are many who swear by its effectiveness, especially in areas that don't have adequate morning sun exposures. These light boxes, when used in the morning, signal to your internal body clock that it's time to get the day started, giving you that much needed boost of energy.

SOUND

- Binaural Beats (tracks to help improve sleep quality):
 - [Amazon](#): Delta Wave and Rain for Deep Sleep.
 - [Spotify](#): Delta Binaural Beats for Deep Sleep which you can play on a loop throughout the night.
- [Lectro Fan sound machine](#): At \$54, this is far and away the highest rated sound machine out there. It's portable, has non-repeating unique sounds, meaning no looping, and effective at masking intruding noise.

- [Noise activated white noise machined](#): Perfect for a kids room, the machine can be pre-programmed to turn off after 15, 30 or 60 minutes AND an option to restart with noise detection. However, I do not like the bright blue night light and typically cover it with a blanket or a towel.

YOUR BED

For unbiased and in depth reviews of different brands and types of mattresses and pillows, check out SleepLikeTheDead.com.

- **Mattresses**: This is a highly subjective purchase, and, in my research, there is no one BEST mattress out there. Instead of choosing a brand, first familiarize yourself with the different *types* of mattresses: air, futon, innerspring (most popular), latex, memory foam and water. Each have pros and cons, especially as it relates to your particular wants/needs including back pain, sleep position and size. Then, there's the mattress size, firmness, conformability and supportiveness, all of which simply need to be tested, in person, in the store.
 - Consumer reports top rated bed: [i8 Dual Air InnovationSeries](#) Foam Mattress from Sleep Number, \$2899
 - Do consider mattresses that are free of flame retardants and are chemical free such as [Tuft and Needle](#) or [SavvyRest](#).
- **Mattress toppers** are placed over the mattress to improve mattress comfort, and is a great way to update an aging mattress, improve firmness and supportiveness and, for people sharing a bed, provide a different level of firmness for one person. Here are some of Amazon's highest rated mattress toppers:
 - [Elastic Memory Foam Mattress Topper](#)
 - [All Natural Latex Topper](#)
 - [Extra Plus Bamboo Fitted Topper](#)
- **Pillows**: Again, there are different types of pillows: feather down, polyester, memory foam, latex etc. and you'll want to select your pillows based on your preferred sleeping position.
 - [MyPillow](#)
- [Allergy pillows & mattress covers](#): Something to consider if you are allergic to or irritated by dust mites. I personally use both as I would frequently wake up in the morning sniffing and coughing.
- [Air purifier](#) or [humidifier](#): Again, creating an allergy-free, clear air sleeping bedroom will certainly help improve the quality of your sleep.

SUPPLEMENTS ETC.

- **Magnesium**
 - [Magnesium flakes](#): A little on the pricey side, but wonderful for baths.
 - [Epsom salts](#): Also great for baths or foot baths.
 - You can also take magnesium supplements in liquid or pill format.
- Lavender [essential oil](#) or [diffuser](#).
- [Melatonin](#) is natural hormone that helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle.
- **Chamomile Tea**: Chamomile has a calming effect and people have used it for thousands of years to help bring the body to a state of calm and rest.

- 1-2 tsp of raw honey just before bed to boost your blood sugar to help improve brain function while you sleep, and thus get better deep sleep.

MINDFULNESS & STRESS

- [Yoga](#): Try some pre-bedtime yoga movements that are particularly effective for bringing on sleep, courtesy of I.AM.YOU studio in New York.
- [Guided Sleep Meditations \(Omvana\)](#): It's a free website and app that lets you handpick the tracks you want to listen to from their library of thousands of audio recordings, some of which are free, others which cost a few dollars. There are a lot of guided meditations for sleep.
- [HeartMath Inner Balance Sensor, \\$129](#): This little gadget is a heart rate variability (HRV) monitor that very simply attaches to your earlobe and monitors your heart rhythm patterns, which you can track in real time on your iPhone. The device forces you to train yourself, through your breathing, to get to and remain in a state of calm; i.e. the green zone (there is also a red and blue zone, depending on your HRV).
- [5 Minute Journal, free](#). The 5 minute journal app forces you to focus on the good things in your life, twice a day. In the mornings, you write down three things you are grateful for, three things that would make today great, and any daily affirmation. In the evenings, you write down three amazing things that happened today and how you could have made the day better. It's a great way to end the day. It also comes with a daily inspirational quote. [A notebook version is also available for purchase here.](#)

Bonus: Inducing a Lucid Dream

I like to compare lucid dreaming to a mindfulness practice because it has everything to do with being conscious about the things in and around us. The definition of lucid dreaming, after all, is the ability to be aware that you're dreaming, so many of the techniques outlined below revolve around developing your ability to keep your thoughts focused and be hyper aware of your environment and how you interact with it.

1. Practice dream recall

Keep a journal beside your bed and write down everything you can remember immediately upon waking, starting with little clues or thoughts and build from there. Work up to a point where you can remember at least one dream per night in as much detail as possible, so that you can paint a clear picture of the kind of dreams you frequently have and then recognize them while they're happening.

2. Identify your dream signs

Once you have 7–12 dreams recorded look for patterns—the odd things, people, or places that make regular appearances. Identify your common dream signs which you'll later be using as target gateways to enter a lucid state.

3. Test your reality

As you go about your day, pay attention to things that happen to and around you, especially anything resembling one of your dream signs. The goal is to test your reality so often that eventually, out of habit, you do it while dreaming. For example, look at objects and notice their patterns, colors, and textures. Look away and then look back, making sure that everything is the same. Throughout the day, ask yourself simple questions like:

Am I dreaming or awake? How do I know? What am I wearing? What's my name? Where am I? What happened five minutes ago?

In a dream world, objects, texts, events and people have a funny way of changing shape and form right before our eyes.

4. Induction

As you're drifting off to sleep, consider the following relaxation and induction exercises:

- *Relax* with a series of [progressive relaxation exercise](#), where you release all tension from your body and clear your mind from the days worries so that you can focus on your intention.
- *Set your intention*: Resolve to be aware of your dream state with a prayer or affirmation.
- *Rehearse the dream*: Visualize your intention over and over as you're falling asleep, where you imagine yourself in a lucid dream—whatever benefit you're seeking or problem you're trying to solve, that should be your intention as you are falling asleep.

5. Split your sleep cycle up

Many lucid dreamers find success splitting their sleep into two sessions where they sleep for 5–6 hours, wake up for an hour, and then go back to sleep and apply the induction techniques. This is because longer, more vivid dreams happen later, which is when we have more REM sleep.