

*There are no magic bullets that guarantee great sleep, but there are a number of steps you can take that will help you rack up the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep we humans need every night.*

**Check out these suggestions for a restful night:**



Photo by Jorge Correa, HM1

sleep



Say Goodnight, Sailor  
Sweet Dreams, Marine

One of the best remedies for stress is a proper night's sleep. Unfortunately, one of the most common side effects of any stress disorder is the inability to get a proper night's sleep.

There are no magic bullets that guarantee great sleep, but there are a number of steps you can take that will help you rack up the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep we humans need every night.

Check out these suggestions for a restful night:

*If you're having trouble sleeping at night, try to eliminate napping. If you must catch a snooze, do it in the early afternoon and sleep no longer than 30 minutes.*

**Keep a regular schedule.** Wake up and go to bed at the same time every day, including weekends.

**Create a restful environment.** Keep the bedroom temperature comfortable and make certain the room is dark enough. To help, invest in some relatively inexpensive items like blackout curtains, a mattress topper or a white-noise machine that reduces outside sounds.

**Use your bed only for sleep and sexual activity.** These activities are the only two associations you need for a bed. If you have a TV in your bedroom, watch it from a chair.

**Set up a "wind-down" period before bedtime to help clear your mind.** Thirty minutes to an hour before bed, stop any activity that energizes you. This includes watching TV, using a computer or playing video games. Relaxing activities to try include a hot shower, warm bath, reading, listening to mood music, meditation or deep-breathing exercises.



**Avoid caffeine (a stimulant) six hours before bedtime.** This includes sports drinks, energy drinks, coffee, tea, soda, diet supplements and pain relievers that contain caffeine. Instead, drink decaffeinated herbal tea, milk, juice or water.

**Don't use alcohol, non-prescribed drugs or nicotine.** Alcohol may initially help you get to sleep, but it prevents the healthy, restful stages of sleep we all need. Over-the-counter sleep aids lead to grogginess. Smoking can cause light sleep, with early-morning wake-ups due to nicotine withdrawal.

**Exercise regularly and stay active during the day.** A daily exercise routine is a great way to reduce stress and relieve insomnia. But do not exercise three hours or less before bedtime.

**Don't go to bed on a full stomach or hungry.** Have dinner in the early evening. If you're hungry near bedtime, try a light snack of cheese, turkey or crackers with a glass of milk.

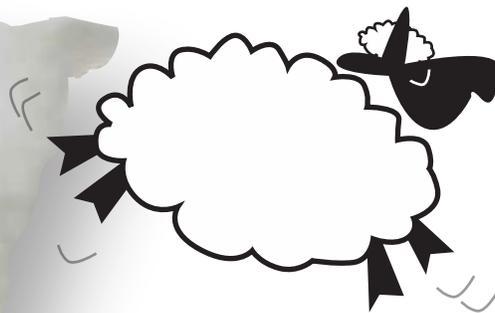
**Stop watching the clock.** Don't look at the clock when you are trying to fall asleep; this just makes you more anxious.

**Get up if you can't sleep.** After 20 or 30 minutes of tossing and turning, get up and go to another room. Try reading to make you drowsy or deep-breathing exercises for relaxation. Concentrate on relaxing your shoulder muscles.

**Talk to your doctor.** If after one week you still have serious sleeping problems, see your doctor or treatment provider. There may be physical reasons why you are unable to sleep, and these should be discussed with a professional.



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Sleep affects a person's reaction time. To see if you're a Sluggish Snail or a Turbo-charged Cheetah, **play "Sheep Dash."**

[www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/sleep/sheep/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/sleep/sheep/)