



# LIVE healthy

## Solve Your Sleep Crisis

From blinking gadgets to hormones gone haywire, the real reasons you can't rest—and what to do about them...starting tonight.

By JENNIFER ABBASI



### SLEEPLESS NIGHTS AREN'T A

modern invention. But experts say modern life is making them increasingly common. “More and more, we are seeing women who have trouble falling—and staying—asleep,” says Rebecca Scott, PhD, a behavioral sleep medicine expert at the New York Sleep Institute. Last year, in fact, women received 5.8 million more prescriptions for sleeping pills than they did just five years earlier.

Psychologists and sleep clinicians believe this sleep crisis is due to increasing stressors like juggling work and family, caring for aging



parents, and the crummy economy. “We now know that many health issues, including sleep disturbance, are related to anxiety,” notes Robin Haight, PsyD, a clinical psychologist in Tyson’s Corner, Virginia. Technology is another modern stimulant: Ever stayed up watching *Mad Men* or playing a game (or 10) of Bejeweled on your smartphone when you knew you should be getting shut-eye?

The toll could be considerable. Aside from leaving you sluggish and cranky, not getting enough sleep can lead to:

- ▶ Depression
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Weight gain
- ▶ Diabetes

With our sleep problems worsening, experts say it’s time we made serious changes to get better rest. Here are real solutions to today’s top sleep obstacles.

**SLEEP PROBLEM NO. 1**

★ **You can’t fall asleep**

Instead of winding down and relaxing before bed, we’re doing chores, checking email, and getting riled up by the TV news till we hit the sack. To create a more snooze-inducing routine:

**DURING THE DAY**

▶ Squeeze in exercise whenever you can. Chris Kline, PhD, who studies the effect of exercise on sleep at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, says that doing even half of the recommended weekly 150 minutes of moderate activity and two muscle-training sessions has been shown to significantly reduce sleep problems in women, in part by regulating body temperature and reducing anxiety and depression. Surprisingly, being active in the early evening may help you fall asleep more easily, Kline says, but see what timing works best for you.

**TWO HOURS BEFORE BEDTIME**

▶ Lower the lights. Turning off lights and lamps

signals to the body that sleep time is near—the way twilight did before we had electric lighting. The type of lightbulbs you use also matters. “The hue of light can be described as warm versus cold, or soft versus harsh,” says Michael Terman, PhD, an expert on light and biological rhythms at Columbia University Medical Center and author of the upcoming book *Chronotherapy*. “Cold, harsh white light”—like that found in fluorescent bulbs—“contains a significant blue component, which is most likely to interfere with sleep onset.” Blue light, more so than other colors in the light spectrum, suppresses the body’s release of melatonin, the hormone that makes us sleepy. The cooler

the prominent colors in a type of lighting (blue and green, say, as opposed to yellow and red), the higher its color temperature, measured in kelvins (K). Check lightbulb packaging for the words “soft” or “warm” and for a color temperature of 3000 K or less, which is less likely to trigger insomnia, Terman says.

**AN HOUR BEFORE BEDTIME**

▶ Dim your screens. Watching TV or  
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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE SLEEP?

Our sleep comprises two parts that we cycle through every 90 to 110 minutes: non-REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which is divided into three stages, and REM sleep:

**NON-REM**

**Stage 1**

As we fall asleep, our brain waves and muscle activity slow down.

**Stage 2**

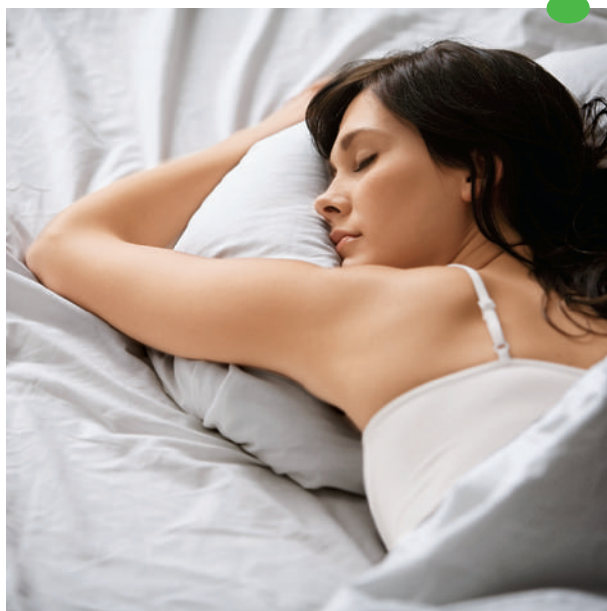
Eye movements stop, our heart rate slows, and our body temperature drops. Our brain waves slow down further but are punctuated by faster waves.

**Stage 3**

This deepest-sleep stage is marked by slow brain waves. Our blood pressure falls, our breathing slows, and our body temperature drops further.

**REM**

Our brain waves, eye movements, breathing, and heart rate speed up, and blood pressure increases, but our limbs become paralyzed. Most dreams take place in REM sleep.



*Do We Really Need 8 Hours?*

*Most of us need seven to eight hours of sleep a night—not only to be sharp, but also to fend off mood disorders and even metabolic problems. A small, unknown number of “short sleepers” may perform well on less. But most folks who don’t snooze long enough just get used to feeling sleepy and performing suboptimally, says Mathias Basner, MD, assistant professor of sleep and chronobiology in the department of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania.*

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tooling around online may help you decompress, but most screens emit more blue light than lamps do, and that—plus any exciting or disturbing stuff you see—will keep your brain going. So if you can't give up your late-night screen time, at least turn down the brightness on your TV, tablet, or computer. You can also install a free program called f.lux on your laptop to automatically reduce the blue light it emits at night.

#### HALF AN HOUR BEFORE

**BEDTIME** ▶ Power down. Now's the time to turn off the tube—experts recommend reading by low lamplight. Pick an article or book that's not so suspenseful it keeps you up (think *Bossypants*, not *Hunger Games*), and nothing work- or school-related—too stressful!



#### SLEEP PROBLEM NO. 2

### ★ You can't stay asleep

It's natural to drift in and out of sleep, especially during the second half of the night. Since slumber grows lighter as we get older, the over-40 set is especially prone to late-night interruptions. What to do when they happen:

**STEP 1** ▶ Don't check the alarm clock to see what time it is, since knowing it's 3 a.m. will only stress you out. Keep the clock under your bed so you can't look.

**STEP 2** ▶ Have a strategy to keep middle-of-the-night

anxiety at bay. When your mind starts going a mile a minute during nighttime wakeups, it's even more impossible to relax back into sleep. If unfinished tasks keep you from sleeping soundly, jot down a to-do list for the next day before turning in. This can help keep you from coming to full consciousness when you wake up. "It tells the brain that it no longer needs to stay on high alert and can focus on promoting sleep," Scott explains. If the thoughts start flooding in anyway, take a deep breath and remind yourself that you've written down everything you need to tackle in the morning, so it's safe to fall back asleep.

**STEP 3** ▶ Mind still racing? "Think of a positive experience you had that day or one thing that you're grateful for," Scott advises. Or visualize yourself in a comfortable place (think the beach, the woods, or a hammock) to create a relaxation response and ease into slumber, Haight says.

**STEP 4** ▶ Fight hot flashes. Lowered estrogen levels can cause this common menopause symptom. When they happen at night, the rise in your body temperature will likely wake you up. If you're facing a regular case of the night sweats, keep your bedroom cool with an open window, fan, or air conditioner, and switch to lightweight cotton PJs and bedding. And talk to your doctor, who may suggest hormone therapy or other medications, such as antidepressants.



### Eat These for Better Zzz's

#### 7 P.M.

##### DINNER

#### *Salmon and a spinach salad*

The fish is high in omega-3s, fats that help produce serotonin, a neurotransmitter that relaxes us, so we sleep more deeply. Spinach is packed with magnesium, which loosens our muscles and calms our nerves.

#### 7:30 P.M.

##### DESSERT

#### *Tart cherries*

They're rich in the sleep hormone melatonin. (The juice works, too.)

#### 9 P.M.

##### BEDTIME SNACK

#### *Warm milk*

Having a glass can be part of a soothing evening routine. (Contrary to popular belief, it's the ritual that calms us, not the small amount of tryptophan in the drink.)

#### 10 P.M.

##### CLOSE THE KITCHEN!

Otherwise, your digestive system will stay active, and so will you.



## When Is It Too Late to Try to Go Back to Sleep?

*If you need to be up in less than 90 minutes, it's better to just get out of bed. We usually wake up during the first, lightest stage of sleep, which occurs about every hour and a half. So if you can't press snooze and get 90 minutes more of slumber before you have to be up, get out of bed—otherwise, you're likely to wake up from a deeper sleep stage, which can leave you groggy.*

# SEE SAFER



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## LIVE HEALTHY | Sleep Solutions

### SLEEP PROBLEM NO. 3

#### ★ Your sleep is interrupted

Enter a snoring husband, bed-hopping pets and kids, or blinking, pinging email alerts on your BlackBerry. To defuse them:

**STEP 1 ▶ Ask your snoring spouse to talk to a doctor.** He could have a treatable condition, like sleep apnea.

**STEP 2 ▶ Keep kids and pets out of your room if you aren't getting restful sleep.** Easier said than done, yes. But be strong!

**STEP 3 ▶** Lights and noises disrupt your sleep more than you might realize. Silence your phone at night and keep it charging where you can't see it. A pitch-black bedroom is ideal for good

sleep, so skip the nightlights and use amber-colored ones in the hallway and in the bathroom—they won't mess with your melatonin levels when you get up to pee in the middle of the night. **Consider installing blackout shades or curtains on your windows, too.** Then simply close your eyes, enjoy the silence, and prepare for a hard-earned night's rest. ■

Don't let sleeping dogs lie in your bed. Put the pet bed outside your door so you can get some shut-eye.



## When You Need an Rx

Today's sleeping pills are much safer than older versions, though some can cause side effects, says Alon Y. Avidan, MD, director of the UCLA Sleep Disorders Center. Since most lose effectiveness over time, they're generally recommended for only 7 to 10 days in a row. What your doctor might suggest based on your situation:

**THE WORKAHOLIC WHO'S UP TOSSING AND TURNING OVER A BIG PROJECT**

▶ **Ambien, Sonata**

If you need to conk out fast (and middle-of-the-night wakeups aren't a problem for you), try one of these drugs. Both bind to areas in the brain that help you modulate sleep to ease you into slumber, then quickly pass out of your system.

**THE EXHAUSTED MOM WHOSE MIND IS RACING WHEN SHE LIES DOWN—AND AGAIN WHEN SHE WAKES UP AT 2 A.M.**

▶ **Ambien CR, Lunesta**

Both of these medications help you fall asleep, but unlike Ambien and Sonata, they're also designed to remain in your bloodstream long enough to keep you asleep all night.

**THE RECENTLY SEPARATED WOMAN WHOSE SADNESS IS KEEPING HER UP AT NIGHT**

▶ **Silenor**

This low-dose form of an anti-depressant is also approved for insomnia. It can be taken long-term without the risk of addiction or major side effects, so it's useful for chronic issues, like depression.

**THE LAWYER WHO WAKES AT 3 A.M. BEFORE A 10 A.M. TRIAL AND NEEDS TO GET BACK TO SLEEP FAST**

▶ **Intermezzo**

This new pill is the only one that's FDA-approved to be taken for insomnia in the middle of the night, rather than before bed. Just make sure you have at least four hours before you have to get up.