

Better Sleep: Fall Asleep Faster, Sleep Deeper

Routines and habits for quality sleep, aiming for about 8 hours

Good sleep is not luck. It comes from **a steady schedule, the right light at the right time, a calm wind-down and a bedroom that supports rest**. This guide covers how sleep works, daytime habits, an evening routine, bedroom setup, ways to fall asleep faster, foods that help, fixes for common problems, a sample 8-hour schedule and when to get help. Most adults need 7 to 9 hours, and 8 is a solid target.

1. How Sleep Works

The science in brief

Why this matters: Understanding what drives sleep makes the habits below make sense and easier to stick to.

FACTOR	WHAT IT DOES	WHAT TO DO
Body clock (circadian rhythm)	A roughly 24-hour internal clock, set mainly by light, tells you when to feel alert and when to feel sleepy.	Wake at the same time daily and get bright light in the morning.
Sleep pressure	The longer you're awake, the more a chemical called adenosine builds, making you sleepy. Caffeine blocks it.	Stay active in the day, avoid long late naps and cut caffeine early.
Melatonin	The hormone that signals night. Bright light and screens in the evening delay it.	Dim lights and reduce screens in the last hour or two.
Body temperature	Core temperature drops as you fall asleep. A cool room and a warm shower beforehand help that drop.	Keep the bedroom cool and take a warm shower 1 to 2 hours before bed.
How much sleep	Most adults need about 7 to 9 hours. Eight is a good target, but needs vary slightly. Taking 10 to 20 minutes to fall asleep is normal.	Aim for consistent, good-quality sleep rather than chasing a perfect number.

2. Daytime Habits That Set You Up

Build sleep from the morning

Why this works: Your sleep tonight begins when you wake up. These daytime habits set the body clock and build sleep pressure.

HABIT	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO DO IT
Wake at the same time every day	A fixed wake time is the strongest anchor for your body clock, even on weekends.	Keep weekends within about 1 hour of weekdays.
Get morning daylight	Bright light soon after waking sets the clock and helps you feel sleepy at the right time at night.	10 to 30 minutes outdoors within an hour of waking.
Move your body	Regular exercise improves deep sleep and reduces anxiety.	30 minutes most days. Finish hard workouts 2 to 3 hours before bed.
Set a caffeine cut-off	Caffeine stays in the body for many hours and can reduce deep sleep even if you fall asleep.	No tea, coffee, cola or energy drinks after about 2 pm, or 8 hours before bed.
Keep naps short	Long or late naps lower sleep pressure for the night.	20 to 30 minutes, before 3 pm.
Eat on a rhythm	Regular meal times support the body clock and avoid late-night hunger.	Finish dinner 2 to 3 hours before bed.

HABIT	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO DO IT
Limit alcohol	It may make you drowsy but breaks up sleep and reduces deep and REM sleep.	Avoid within 3 to 4 hours of bed, and keep intake low.

3. Your Evening Wind-Down

A routine to repeat nightly

Why this works: A repeating wind-down tells your brain it is time to switch off. Start about 2 to 3 hours before bed.

WHEN	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT HELPS
3 hours before	Finish your last big meal. Avoid heavy, spicy or very sugary food, and keep alcohol low.	A heavy stomach and reflux make it harder to settle.
2 hours before	Dim the lights at home, and finish stressful work or tough conversations.	Low light helps melatonin rise, and calm helps the mind slow.
1 to 2 hours before	Take a warm shower or bath.	Warming then cooling the body helps it drop to sleep temperature.
1 hour before	Switch off screens or use night mode and keep brightness low. Put the phone out of reach.	Blue light and stimulating content delay sleep.
30 to 45 minutes before	Write a to-do list for tomorrow and any worries on paper.	Getting thoughts out of your head reduces racing thoughts in bed.
15 to 30 minutes before	Light stretching, gentle yoga, slow breathing or reading a paper book.	Relaxes the muscles and nervous system.
Bedtime	Lights out at the same time each night and go to bed only when sleepy.	A fixed routine becomes a signal for the brain.

4. Your Bedroom Setup

Cool, dark, quiet

Why this works: The bedroom should be a cool, dark and quiet place that you use for sleep.

ELEMENT	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT HELPS
Cool	Aim for a comfortable cool temperature, about 18 to 24 C. Use a fan or AC at a moderate setting.	Warm rooms fragment sleep.
Dark	Blackout curtains or an eye mask, and cover small LED lights.	Even small light can disrupt melatonin.
Quiet	Earplugs, or steady white noise or a fan if outside sounds wake you.	Sudden noises cause micro-awakenings.
Comfortable	A supportive mattress, pillow and breathable cotton bedding.	Discomfort leads to tossing and turning.
Bed for sleep only	Avoid working, scrolling or watching TV in bed.	Trains your brain to link bed with sleep.
Phone out of reach	Charge it across the room and use a basic alarm.	Removes temptation and night-time checking.

5. Falling Asleep Faster

Techniques for a busy mind

Why this works: These techniques help you fall asleep when your mind is busy. Try a few and keep the ones that work.

TECHNIQUE	HOW TO DO IT	WHY IT HELPS
Slow breathing (4-7-8 or extended exhale)	Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 (or skip the hold) and breathe out slowly for 8. Repeat 4 to 8 rounds.	A longer exhale activates the body's relaxation response.
Progressive muscle relaxation	Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds and release, from feet up to the face.	Releases physical tension and distracts from thoughts.
Body scan	Lie still and slowly move attention from toes to head, noticing each area without trying to change it.	Shifts the mind away from worries.
Mental imagery	Picture a calm, detailed scene, like walking through a quiet beach or forest, or a simple sequence of unrelated words.	Occupies the mind in a boring, relaxing way.
Get up if you can't sleep	If you're awake after about 20 minutes, leave bed, sit in dim light and do something quiet. Return when sleepy.	Stops the bed from becoming linked with frustration.
Stop clock-watching	Turn the clock away and don't calculate how much sleep you will get.	Checking the time raises anxiety and delays sleep.
Try staying awake gently	Lie with eyes open and tell yourself to stay awake. This is paradoxical intention.	Reduces the effort and pressure of trying to sleep.

6. Foods and Drinks for Sleep

What helps and what to limit

Note: What you eat and drink affects sleep, but it works best alongside the habits above. See the foods for sleep guide for more.

FOOD OR DRINK	WHY	WHEN
Warm milk or a haldi milk	Contains tryptophan and calcium, and the routine itself is calming.	30 to 60 minutes before bed.
Kiwi	Small studies link it with faster sleep and longer sleep.	2 kiwis about an hour before bed.
Banana, almonds	Magnesium and potassium help muscles relax.	A small portion in the evening.
Ragi or oats porridge	A small, light carb portion can help you feel sleepy.	If hungry 2 hours after dinner.
Chamomile or tulsi tea	Caffeine-free, warm and soothing.	After dinner, without sugar.
Limit: caffeine, alcohol, heavy or spicy dinner, lots of fluids late	These cause awakenings, reflux or bathroom trips.	Taper fluids 1 to 2 hours before bed.

7. Fixing Common Sleep Problems

Cause and fix

Tip: Match the problem to its likely cause and fix.

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO TRY
Can't fall asleep	Stress, caffeine, late screens, irregular schedule	Use the wind-down routine, a fixed wake time and relaxation techniques.
Wake up at 2 or 3 am	Stress, alcohol, noise, light or a full bladder	Avoid alcohol, keep the room dark, don't check the clock, and use slow breathing.
Wake tired after 8 hours	Poor sleep quality, irregular timing or a sleep disorder	Fix timing and environment, and see a doctor if it continues.
Racing thoughts	Unprocessed worries	Write a worry and to-do list earlier in the evening.
Sleepy in the afternoon	Short sleep or poor quality, heavy lunch	A 20-minute nap, a lighter lunch and daylight exposure.
Shift work or jet lag	Body clock out of sync	Use bright light at the right times, dark rooms and gradual shifts in timing.

8. A Sample 8-Hour Schedule

Putting it together

Example: A sample day to protect 8 hours of sleep. Adjust the times to your own schedule, keeping the gaps the same.

TIME	WHAT TO DO
6:30 am	Wake up, no snooze, drink water
6:45 am	10 to 20 minutes of daylight, walk or stretch
2:00 pm	Last tea or coffee
6:00 pm	Workout if it suits you (finish 2 to 3 hours before bed)
8:00 pm	Light dinner
9:00 pm	Dim the lights, write tomorrow's to-do list
9:30 pm	Warm shower
9:45 pm	Screens off, read or stretch, breathing exercise
10:15 pm	In bed, room cool and dark
10:30 pm to 6:30 am	8 hours of sleep

9. When to See a Doctor

Signs not to ignore

Remember: Persistent sleep problems may have a medical cause. Don't ignore them.

SIGN	WHAT TO DO
Loud snoring with pauses in breathing, gasping or morning headaches	Could be sleep apnoea. Get assessed, as it affects heart health.
Trouble sleeping at least 3 nights a week for over 3 months	Could be chronic insomnia. CBT for insomnia is the first-line treatment.
Strong urge to move the legs at night	Could be restless legs syndrome or low iron. Ask your doctor.
Extreme daytime sleepiness or falling asleep suddenly	See a doctor. Could be another sleep disorder or medical issue.
Low mood, anxiety or ongoing stress with poor sleep	Talk to a doctor or mental health professional.

Note: This is general sleep-health information, not medical advice. Individual sleep needs vary, and occasional poor nights are normal. Check with a doctor before using melatonin or sleep aids, especially if you take medication or have a medical condition.