

Soothing Sleep Tips

Here are seven smart, easy-to-follow tips to help you sleep throughout the night.



If you toss and turn in the middle of the night, you're not alone. According to a National Sleep Foundation poll, 75% of adults have symptoms of sleep problems. For some, it's even worse: The National Institutes of Health estimates that one in three Americans have symptoms of insomnia, and 10% of those people have a hard time getting shut-eye every night. **To help you ease into a restful night's sleep, here are seven easy-to-follow strategies:**

- ▶ **Set the scene.** Creating a bedroom environment conducive to sleep will help you get into slumber-mode. You can help condition yourself for sleep by tapping into your body's internal clock. About an hour before you plan to go to bed, dim the lights significantly. This will help trigger your natural circadian rhythm to ease you into sleep. To help avoid middle-of-the-night stress, move your clock out of your line of sight. If you wake in the night and see the clock, it may trigger you to become fully awake and make it harder to get back to sleep.
- ▶ **Straighten out neck pain.** For a sound sleep, you'll need a pillow designed to keep your neck aligned and reduce the risk of pain. Look for pillows with memory foam that molds around your head and neck, keeping your neck aligned with your spine—the optimal position for comfortable sleep. Foam pillows will also keep their shape longer over time, unlike feather fills.
- ▶ **Breathe deep.** Slow, deep abdominal breathing may help reduce anxiety and help you wind down for bed. With your tongue resting on the roof of your mouth just behind your upper teeth, exhale completely. Close your mouth, and inhale through your nose for four counts. Hold your breath for seven counts. Then exhale while mentally counting to eight. Repeat the cycle three more times.

- ▶ **Establish a routine.** Before your brain will let you drift off to dreamland, it needs some time to sort through your action-packed (and likely stress-filled) day. Establishing a regular ritual (such as taking a bath, sipping non-caffeinated tea, or breathing deeply) may help condition your brain and body for sleep—telling all your senses that it's time to hit the hay.

- ▶ **Go classical.** Soft music (such as slow classical or jazz) with no more than 60 to 80 beats per minute may help lull you into a restful sleep. Tuning in to such soothing sounds about 45 minutes before bed may help slow your breathing and heart rates.

- ▶ **Ease back aches.** Those twinges in your back can lead to sleep loss. Here are three pre-bedtime stretches that can help work out those aches:
 1. **Neck stretch:** Sit on floor with legs crossed. Place left hand on right side of head, and gently pull head toward left shoulder (keep shoulder down), feeling a stretch on right side of neck. Hold for three deep breaths. Return to start, and repeat on right side.

 2. **Hip-buttock stretch:** Lie on back with feet off floor, and cross right ankle over left knee. Grasp back of left thigh near knee, and gently pull legs toward chest, feeling a stretch in right hip and buttock. Hold for three deep breaths. Switch legs, and repeat.

 3. **Child's pose:** Lie face down with knees tucked under you and arms extended in front, so you feel a stretch from shoulders to lower back. Take several deep breaths to release all the tension in your back. Slowly walk arms to the right so that torso extends toward 2 o'clock position. You should feel a stretch on left side of torso. Take 3 deep breaths. Return to center, and repeat to left side.

- ▶ **Move to snooze.** If you find yourself awake and counting sheep into six figures, time for another trick. After 15 to 30 minutes of lying in bed awake, get out of bed. Avoid turning on bright lights, and find something calming to do such as listening to music, reading, or knitting.