# Three Steps to a Good Night's Sleep

You know that not sleeping well can make you cranky, but did you know that a good night's sleep can protect your health? Poor sleep can lead to health issues such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stress, depression, and anxiety. It has also been linked to an increased risk of accidents. So what's the link between sleep and health?

As you sleep, your body repairs itself. If you're coming down with an illness, for example, your immune system releases proteins called cytokines while you sleep. These proteins fight infection and regulate deeper sleep. The more sleep you get when you're sick — and the deeper that sleep is — the better you'll be able to fight the illness.

[How much sleep you need each night depends on your age](#), but *how* do you get a good night's sleep? It just takes a little TLC: timing, limits, and comfort.

Good sleep is just a part of a healthy lifestyle. Check out the Guide to Staying Healthy to stay on top of your health and live comfortably at home.

Read the Guide to Staying Healthy
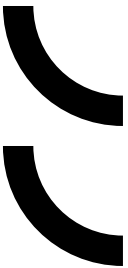
Timing

One of the keys to sleeping well is timing. If you often go to bed or wake up at random hours during the day or night, you may not find yourself feeling well-rested.

To help you rest better:

- Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.

- Create a bedtime routine — read, take a warm bath, play restful music, or do gentle stretches. A nightly routine lets your mind know that it's time to wind down.

Limits

How well you sleep can depend on various factors — and many of them are ones you can control.

To set good limits for yourself, keep in mind these sleeping tips:

- If you're a napper, try to keep naps to 30 minutes, and don't nap late in the day.

- Exercise can improve sleep, but if it energizes you, keep late-afternoon or evening workouts to a slower pace.

- Instead of eating a big meal at night, make lunch your main meal. You'll have more time to digest it before bed. Cutting down on spicy foods can help prevent heartburn, which can interfere with getting a good night's sleep.

- It's important to [stay hydrated](), but try to avoid drinking fluids before bedtime, especially if you wake up often to go to the bathroom. Warm milk or herbal tea in the early evening may help you relax though.

- You probably know to avoid coffee, but don't forget that chocolate and even coffee ice cream contain caffeine, as do some teas and sodas.

- Remember that nicotine and alcohol mess with your sleep.

- Research indicates that too much screen time close to bedtime can stimulate or wake up your brain. Instead of looking at your phone, tablet, or TV, stick with a book or magazine. Use low-wattage bulbs in the bedroom, and block light from windows and electrical devices such as clocks and cell phones.

- If you have to get up at night to use the bathroom, using a low-wattage lamp or a nightlight instead of bright lights will make it easier to go back to sleep.

Comfort

How comfortable you are in your sleeping space can also affect how good your sleep is. Do you need a pitch-dark room and no noise, or is the whirr of a fan reassuring? What's the best temperature for you?

Make sure your space meets your needs, and ask yourself these questions to increase your comfort at bedtime:

- Is your mattress or pillow keeping you up at night? If you wake up feeling more refreshed after a night in a hotel or while visiting others than you do in your own bed, your bedding might be keeping you awake.

- Does it take you a long time to fall asleep? If you can't fall asleep within 15 minutes, don't toss and turn in bed. Get up and read a book or listen to music until you feel tired. Avoid reading on a phone or tablet or watching TV, though — blue light from these devices can interfere with sleep.

- Do you have too much on your mind when you are trying to go to bed? Stress can keep you from sleeping, so be sure to take care of yourself and make time to relax. Putting

your mind at ease can bring you more comfort when your head hits the pillow each night.

- Are you afraid of [falling out of bed while you're asleep](#)? Installing bed rails or putting a wedge pillow in your bed can prevent a fall — and help you sleep easier.

Get a Better Night's Rest

Plenty of factors can get in the way of you getting your best sleep, but there are many changes you can make to your space and routine that can help you sleep better.

You may find a big difference after changing your pillow, for example, and that's great! But if you're still not sleeping well 2 weeks after trying these tips, talk to your doctor or care provider about other options. They can help you figure out what's going on and how to improve your sleep.