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Solutions to 3 common sleep problems

You spend about seven hours in bed each night to reach your recommended sleep time. But are you making them count? Try these tips for quality slumber and you'll always wake up refreshed.

I have trouble falling asleep. Making the most of your hours in bed starts before you even lie down. In the hour or two before heading to sleep, put down the electronics. The power of these devices is close to magic, but they won't get you any closer to dreamland. The blue light they emit could make it more difficult to sleep because it blocks the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps you nod off.

Still struggling? Try getting back up.

"The rule of thumb is that if you're in bed and you're not able to sleep within about 20 minutes, then it's best to actually get out of bed, do something relaxing, and return to bed when sleepy," says Dr. Nitun Verma, spokesperson for the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

Feeling slow and groggy doesn't have to be an inherent part of waking up, suggests a recent study. The same soothing music that eases you to sleep may be able to ease you awake, too. Pleasant tones, like soft, harmonic sounds, rather than a jarring alarm, could help you feel more alert.

Nature calls in the middle of the night. Stop drinking liquids a few hours ahead of bedtime, and go to the bathroom right before lights out. If you still feel the urge during the night, keep lighting to a minimum, while still being safe, on your route to the bathroom. Bright overhead lights can trick your body into thinking it's time to get up. Instead, install motion-sensitive lights along your baseboards to illuminate your path.

If you find yourself waking up to use the restroom often during the night, consider speaking with your doctor.

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I wake up and can't go back to sleep. Keeping your brain busy up until bedtime may seem like the best way to use all your waking hours, but this can make it difficult to stay asleep. Verma recommends creating a wind-down routine for yourself before you go to bed. That way, you're already relaxed when your head hits the pillow.

One to two hours before bed, start de-stressing. Two things you can do to get a good night's sleep every night are turning on some calming music and then jotting down any to-do's on your mind along with your anxious thoughts. You could also read a chapter of a novel — just don't get sucked in.

If you do find yourself awake in the middle of the night, don't reach for your phone or the light switch. Instead, practice your preferred relaxation technique. A good one to try is tensing and relaxing muscle groups. Move up your body from your feet to your face.

Avoid morning soreness with proper bed posture

Night after night you climb into bed and curl into your favorite position. You may not think of your pose as strategic, but maybe you should. As a general rule, you want all your joints and limbs to lie in a neutral position. One tool that helps you achieve this is the humble pillow. Use these tips to position yours to relieve pain.

- Heartburn. Lying on your back can make it easier for stomach acid to move up your esophagus and create an unpleasant burning sensation. Elevate your head and upper body with a foam wedge pillow to reduce this effect.

- Backache. Sleeping on your back can help with pain. To find your most comfortable position, see if you can easily fit your hand in the space between your lower back and mattress. If yes, bend your knees until your back touches your hand and slip a pillow underneath your knees. This keeps your spine from arching unnaturally.