

# REST ASSURED

Regular, sound slumber is the holy grail of good health. Here are 10 new ways to achieve it.

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Photographs by Burcu Avsar



**SHORT ON SLEEP?** Join the club. One in three adults doesn't get the minimum suggested seven hours a night, according to a 2016 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But simply recognizing the problem isn't enough: Of the Americans who admitted that they don't catch enough z's, less than half were doing anything about it, as reported in a recent survey from the Better Sleep Council, a consumer education group.

"Society views sleep as something that can be sacrificed," says Patrick M. Fuller, Ph.D., an associate professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School. "Consistent, good

sleep is essential for your physical, emotional, and neurocognitive health. Yet we prioritize work, social media, and TV time over it." Even when we do power down, lifestyle factors such as diet, stress, and health conditions, including menopause, can upend our plans for peaceful slumber.

The result, Fuller believes, is a "modern-day health crisis." Indeed, it seems that every month, a new malady is being blamed on poor sleep, including heart disease, inflammation, depression, and compromised immune function. Our day-to-day activities suffer, too.

"Research shows that we make three times more mental errors after a few nights of less-than-optimal sleep," says W. Christopher Winter, M.D., the medical director of the Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital Sleep Medicine Center, in Charlottesville, Virginia. "Maybe that little fender bender you got in could have been avoided if you had gone to bed an hour earlier last night."

In response to an increasingly exhausted population, innovators across all industries have been developing advances that aim to help us zonk out quickly, snooze soundly, and wake up energized. Read on for five research-backed strategies to enhance your sleep, plus the latest high-tech and low-tech ways of putting each tip into effect.

### Pause to reflect

A 2015 *JAMA Internal Medicine* study found that meditating 5 to 20 minutes a day can put you to sleep faster than basic techniques, such as establishing a bedtime routine. "Mindfulness reduces stress and leads to a calmer state, making it easier to fall asleep," says Michael R. Irwin, M.D., a study coauthor and the director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center at the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience. Try meditating at bedtime by focusing on your breath to clear your mind of any emotions (*I'm so wound up I'll never fall asleep!*) and thought-drifting. (*The numbers on the clock are whizzing by!*). If your mind does wander, refocus on your breathing and "observe your thoughts without judgment, so your brain doesn't feel so aroused," says Irwin.

**LOW-TECH HELP:** Meditate as suggested above, or download free guided meditation podcasts from Irwin's lab at [marc.ucla.edu](http://marc.ucla.edu).

**HIGH-TECH HELP:** The Glo to Sleep Therapy Mask (\$30, [soundoasis.com](http://soundoasis.com)) is designed to quiet an overactive mind by having you focus on gradually vanishing blue lights; the idea is that you will fade out before they do. Or try the NightWave Sleep Assistant (\$49, [nightwave.com](http://nightwave.com)), a small black machine that projects an oscillating pattern of bright and dim light onto the ceiling or wall. The concept is simple: As you inhale and exhale in sync with the light, you enter a meditative trance that lulls you into slumber.

## Keep your cool

“If your partner likes the bedroom hot and you like it cold, you win,” says Winter. Here’s your argument: Our body temperature naturally dips before bedtime. (Scientists aren’t sure why; one theory is that this is the body’s way to conserve energy.) “Sleeping in a too-warm environment forces your body to work to regulate your temperature,” says Winter, “leading to more frequent awakenings and lighter, more fitful sleep.” A bedroom temperature of 60 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit is optimal for sleep. If that feels too cold at bedtime, program the thermostat to drop overnight and go back up right before you awake.

**LOW-TECH HELP:** Try performance sleepwear and bedding, which use moisture-wicking fabrics to keep you cool. Try Cool-jams’ Moisture-Wicking Shorty Pajama Set (\$69, cool-jams.com) and Sheex’s Original Performance sheets and pillowcases (\$199 for a queen set, sheex.com). Avoiding evening workouts helps, too, since exercise elevates your core body temperature for up to six hours.

**HIGH-TECH HELP:** Chill out on the ChiliPad (\$999 for queen, chilitechnology.com), a mattress topper that contains tiny tubes that are filled with temperature-regulated water. A remote control sets the temperature, and dual zoning means that you can sleep like you’re in Alaska while your partner enjoys a more tropical climate.



## FRIENDLY BED BUGS

**The bacteria in your intestines—a.k.a. your gut microbiome—may influence your sleep quality, helping produce serotonin and other sleep-regulating neurotransmitters. And, like you, these gut bacteria function on a circadian rhythm, says Shawn Stevenson, the author**

**of Sleep Smarter. “At night, a changing of the guard happens, where the good bacteria reclaim control from the bad bacteria that build up during the day,” he says. Poor sleep can allow the opportunistic bacteria to take over, potentially paving the way for many ills. (In one small study published in the journal *Cell*, jet-lagged people had elevated levels of types of bacteria that are more prevalent in people with obesity and diabetes.)**

**Getting a good night’s sleep is ideal, but you can also fuel the good bacteria: Eat probiotic foods (such as kefir, yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles, miso, and kombucha) along with high-fiber prebiotic foods (such as beans, dried fruits, oats, onions, raw garlic, and asparagus), which act as sustenance for the probiotics.**

## Rise and shine on time

Fuller’s top tip for quality sleep: Get up at the same time every day, 16 hours before your next bedtime. “After about 16 hours of being awake, a phenomenon called sleep pressure takes over,” he says. During waking hours, the sleep-promoting chemical adenosine builds up in the brain. After about 16 hours, the pressure of all that adenosine becomes hard to resist, and you’ll start to nod off. Fuller says a 5:30 or 6 A.M. wake-up, around sunrise, tends to work well for most people, especially if you start at this time of year, when there is still plenty of daylight. Then, when you get drowsy at around 10 P.M., hit the sack without delay.

**LOW-TECH HELP:** An old-school alarm clock.

**HIGH-TECH HELP:** The Sense by Hello smart-alarm system (\$129, hello.is) clips to your pillow to track your movements and wakes you during a light phase of sleep, up to 30 minutes before your set time. “You should have less sleep inertia [that groggy feeling], so waking up will feel easier,” says Fuller.

## Use smell to your advantage

Lavender and sleep do make lovely bedfellows. “Lavender essential oil has calming, sleep-inducing chemical properties that are thought to impact neurotransmitters in the brain,” says Angela Lillehei, Ph.D., an integrative health expert and the lead author of a 2015 *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* study in which subjects who slept with a lavender-essential-oil chest patch for five nights had better sleep quality compared with those wearing blank patches. And the sleep benefits remained after two weeks of sleeping patch-free. The National Sleep Foundation recommends lavender because it lowers both the heart rate and blood pressure, which may help you to fall asleep faster.

Come morning, if you’re a coffee drinker, the smell of the brew might give you a short-lived bright-eyed buzz. “It can perk you up almost immediately,” says Alan Hirsch, M.D., the neurological director of the



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Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation, in Chicago. (Just don't use your programmable coffeemaker as an alarm clock: According to Rachel Herz, Ph.D., a Brown University expert in the psychological sense of smell, scents can wake you up only if you're in a very light stage of sleep.)

**LOW-TECH HELP:** Spritz a lavender mist on your pillow. Try Aura Cacia's Chill Pill Essential Solutions Spray (\$8, auracacia.com). It uses *Lavandula angustifolia*, the species used in Lillehei's study.

**HIGH-TECH HELP:** The Aura-Breeze Aroma Diffuser (\$100, oregonscientific.com) uses vapor-diffusing technology on a sleep mode to knock you out.

### Assume the position

While your brain is busy thinking and learning during the day, potentially harmful metabolic by-products are building up. Fortunately, scientists have discovered that the brain has a cleanup crew: The glymphatic system, which shuttles toxins and waste products out of the brain to help maintain normal brain function, "is most active at night," says Helene Benveniste, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of anesthesiology at the Stony Brook School of Medicine, in New York, who has studied the glymphatic system. Research is ongoing, but experts believe that this nightly clean sweep could help preserve memory, boost energy, and strengthen the immune system. Lack of sleep hinders the process, and experts hypothesize that this may be a factor in the "growing evidence suggesting that sleep disorders are common among people with minimal cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease," says Benveniste. In a

recent study, she and her colleagues found that side sleeping allowed for more waste removal in rodents than back or stomach sleeping. It's too soon to know if the same effect applies to humans (studies are under way), but trying this couldn't hurt.

**LOW-TECH HELP:** Encourage side sleeping by spooning a body pillow. Or try the Rest-Rite Sleep Positioner (\$17 for seven, restrite.com), which easily adheres to your back.

**HIGH-TECH HELP:** The It Bed by Sleep Number mattress (\$1,099 for queen, itbed.sleepnumber.com) has sensors that track heart rate and motion and breathing patterns. Adjustable air chambers inside it relieve pressure on the shoulders and the hips for easier side sleeping.



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