

Suggested strategies to optimise sleep

The following strategies may or may not work for you. Perhaps choose **one** suggestion that you aren't currently doing and stick with it for several weeks.

- Wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. When opening your eyes after waking, light reaches the part of the brain responsible for keeping your internal clock regular. This daily dose of light at the same time will signal this is the end of sleep and help maintain the same sleep pattern each day. If you can, expose yourself to morning sunlight by having your coffee outside or by taking your dog out for a walk.
- Avoid looking at screens before bedtime and when you wish to be asleep. The backlight from phones, tablets and laptops can signal to the part of your brain that controls the sleep/wake cycle that this is morning sunlight. This can wake you up further.
- Establish a bedtime routine to help your body get ready for sleep. For instance, you could take a shower, drink a warm (non-caffeinated) beverage, brush your teeth, read a book (one you can put down after a chapter), and listen to a relaxing podcast, music, or TV show that you only use for falling asleep. Playing something familiar can help if you drift off while it's playing, as you know how it ends and so it doesn't matter if you miss it!
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex. The bedroom should be an enjoyable place to be, not invaded by work, laptops, TV, or anything other than a comfortable bed. This helps to associate the bedroom with being asleep.
- If you do wake up during the night, try not to be annoyed. Waking up is a normal part of sleep, and as we get older, this will become more frequent. Becoming stressed about being awake can release the stress hormone cortisol, which can make it harder to get back to sleep.
- If you are awake longer than 15 minutes during the night, get out of bed and do something boring that doesn't require bright lights. For example, fold the washing, read a book that isn't great, or do a puzzle that isn't too difficult.
- If you have symptoms of sleep-disordered breathing, such as snoring, waking up gasping or someone has observed your breathing not being regular during sleep, then consider talking to your GP to arrange a sleep study.

- Restless legs syndrome can feel like itching or crawling sensations in the legs. If you have these uncomfortable sensations, you may want to consider making changes to your diet. Reducing caffeine and increasing iron, folate and magnesium intake can reduce these symptoms. Other home-based techniques include massaging your legs and taking warm baths. If these don't work, you might want to talk to your doctor about medications that can help.
- Cut back on caffeine and keep it under 300-400 mg daily (about 100-200 mg per cup of coffee). Caffeine acts as a 'stimulant' as it is an adenosine receptor antagonist. Adenosine promotes sleepiness and therefore, caffeine can keep you from feeling sleepy. Caffeine works quickly and stays in your system for several hours. This can make it hard to fall asleep at night. Therefore, a good rule of thumb is to avoid caffeine after 2pm. It's not just coffee you need to watch out for, caffeine is found in other things such as tea, chocolate and soft drinks such as Coca Cola.

Revised February 2025