

Sleeping Better to Feel Better

These are additional simple and easy to implement strategies to use routinely:

Evening tasks:

- **Eat early evening and Skip the snacks:** Late meals and night snacking can contribute to digestive discomfort and acid reflux. These symptoms intensify when we lay down too soon after eating. Not eating for 3 hours before bed allows digestion to complete before going horizontal.

Additionally, allowing digestion to take place during waking hours means that the body is free to perform other important functions, like **making our “feel-good” hormones** when sleeping.

- **Drink responsibly:** Alcohol before bed might help you fall asleep initially, but it ultimately suppresses REM [rapid eye movement] sleep. It is very common to wake after a couple of hours and struggle to get back to sleep. Have your drink with dinner and allow a few hours for digestion before bed.
- **Gradually turn down the lights** at home. Go to lamps vs. overhead lights. Try to mimic the sun setting with less and less light as bedtime approaches. Melatonin will be produced with this strategy and sleep will come easier.
- **Turn off the tube (and other screens):** Computers, cell phones, tablets and television emit bright light that suppress the brain’s release of our sleep hormone, melatonin. Turning off the screen at least an hour (best=3 hours) before lights out and picking up a book allows our body to get tired and fall asleep naturally. In addition, blue light filters, darkening curtains and turning off nightlights are supportive as well.
- **Don’t over water:** Drinking water is at the top of many of our personal “to-do” lists but drinking too much before bed can cause us to wake to urinate throughout the night. Humans can store up to a quart of fluid in our legs. When we lay down, we release the hold of gravity and that fluid moves to our bladder. **Limiting late evening water intake** and elevating our legs for a while during calm down time before sleep can **eliminate mid-sleep potty breaks**.
- **Set an alarm on your smartphone** to remind you that it is time to prepare for bed so that time doesn’t just pass by. **Important when first starting.** Your internal alarm will take over after a week or so.

Just before lights out:

- Have an **attitude of gratitude:** Studies show that focusing on the things we are grateful for will help us fall asleep and stay asleep. Gratitude is related to the promotion of positive thoughts and at bedtime, it’s far easier to drift off smiling about the gifts of the day than what health insurance you are going to choose. Try jotting (yes, paper and pen—remember, no screens!) down one to three things that you are grateful for from the last 24 hours. Hopefully, “a good night’s sleep” will soon make the list.

- **Bathroom break:** Go to the bathroom immediately before lights out so the urge does not wake you in the middle of the night.

Just after lights out:

Take a breath: Studies have shown that slow, deep breathing (belly breaths) for five minutes, twice a day can **cut cortisol (stress hormone) by 50%**! Deep breathing kicks the nervous system from sympathetic (fight or flight) mode into parasympathetic (relaxation) mode.

After you slip between the sheets, try taking 10 to 15 **deep and slow** breaths, inhaling through your nose for 4-5 seconds, briefly pausing and exhaling through the mouth for six or so seconds. You may not make it all the way to 15 before you fall asleep.

At 3 am when you can't go back to sleep:

Those worrisome thoughts just keep coming, even though you realize that they are not that important, and you will be wondering in the morning why they were so worrisome to you in the middle of the night.

No need to solve problems at 3 am that will be insignificant in a few hours when you awaken. Plus, since you are on the path to Being Better, everything is really okay.

Here's a solution:

Turn your pillow over (to the cool side).

Close your eyes.

Perform deep, slow breaths (described above) which work especially well if you focus on your slow, deep breaths. By combining the slow breaths with **visualizing** a relaxing scenario, it will take you and your mind to another "existence" or a sanctuary for sleep. This may be:

- Lying in a canoe on a calm lake with nothing but blue sky above you, or
- Snuggled in a warm mountain cabin in the forest
- Use the slow, deep breathing technique above. Focus on your breath.



- Yawn by visualizing yourself doing so. Yawning relaxes you and provides a sense of well-being. (Proven scientifically.)
- When intruding thoughts come, just acknowledge them and then “dismiss them graciously.” Don’t fight it, just let them go like a leaf that just floats away down a stream.
- Your mind is wired to think thoughts. You can’t stop that. Fighting thoughts makes things worse. Accept the thoughts and just “let them go,” peacefully.
- Yawn again. Sweet dreams.



Joy says: **Your tomorrow begins today. Make tomorrow as good as it can be by planning for good sleep today.**