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SLEEP MODE: STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY REST

Many of us think that rest should be earned; that it's a reward for tasks completed. But sleep is a fundamental pillar of well-being and physical health, and a deficit can have far-reaching effects beyond the dark circles under our eyes. Read on for solutions.

'I find the nights long, for I sleep but little, and think much.' If Charles Dickens' words resonate with you, then you may be among the 10% of adults who suffer from insomnia. However, the world isn't divided into insomniacs and perfect sleepers. There are all kinds of ways to sleep poorly...

Not getting enough sleep is known as sleep deprivation, and it can wreak havoc on your life and health if it goes on for a considerable period. Sleep deficiency, on the other hand, is a little more generalised and common. It can refer to occasional sleep deprivation; sleeping at the wrong time of day; not getting all the types of sleep your body needs (including light sleep, deep sleep and rapid-eye movement sleep, also known as the dreaming stage of sleep); and

having a disorder that prevents you from getting enough sleep or causes poor-quality sleep (from snoring to sleep apnoea to insomnia).

There are many reasons you may be sleeping poorly at night, from stress to unhealthy habits like alcohol consumption or too much screen time. And while you may be all too familiar with the leaden feeling of dragging yourself out of bed when the alarm goes off, you may not know the full impact that limited rest has on your physical and cognitive well-being.

MORE THAN A LITTLE TIRED

Think of our brains as computers. When we sleep, we're deleting unnecessary or resolved files that our brain creates during the day, freeing up space in our mental hard drives. This is why we wake up from a good sleep feeling rested mentally and physically. If we're not mentally disconnecting through sleep – perhaps because we're ruminating over to-do lists or issues left over from the day – then we're not giving our bodies the time needed to reboot and reset.



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Just one night of poor sleep can affect cognitive function the next day, impairing our ability to perform complex mental tasks. Over time, sleep deprivation can contribute to problems such as heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity and depression. However, with commitment and consistency, you can ensure you get longer and deeper sleep every night. Here are some factors to consider to give quality sleep your best shot.

1. IMPROVE SLEEP HYGIENE

Sleep hygiene refers to a set of behavioral and environmental factors you set up to support healthy sleep patterns. Try the following:

- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day (yes, even on weekends). This trains your body clock and sets you up for a more consistent sleep cycle.
- Ensure your bedroom is not too hot or too cold, and that it's dark. Darkness stimulates the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps you get to sleep faster.
- The blue light emitted by screens can play havoc with your internal clock. Try to avoid screens for at least two hours before bedtime.
- Choose your pillow wisely. A pillow should provide spinal alignment, otherwise your body will actively try to correct itself as you sleep.
- Keep your bedroom free of clutter, which can cause mental stress that you're not even aware of, and negatively impact your sleep.

2. LET FOOD BE THY MEDICINE

Some foods can make it easier or harder to sleep. For better sleep, try to avoid the following during the latter part of the day: caffeine, high-GI and sugary foods, fatty or highly processed foods, and alcohol.

On the other side of the spectrum, ensuring that you have enough calcium, magnesium and vitamins A, C, D, E and K in your diet can promote better sleep.

In a similar vein, weight management can help you sleep better. Obesity is a huge contributing factor to the sleep disorder known as obstructive sleep apnoea, which causes impaired breathing and multiple awakenings at night.

3. KEEP MOVING

Getting regular exercise can help you fall asleep faster and improve sleep quality. You don't have to go extra hard at the gym either: you should see the benefits after just 30 minutes of mild to moderate movement a day.

What time should you exercise? There is some debate about this in the medical community. It's best to try exercising at different times and noting how this impacts your sleep specifically.

4. CHECK IN WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

If you're battling any kind of mental or emotional turmoil, it's possible to take all of the above steps and still not get enough shut-eye. Psychological support in the form of therapy may be what's needed to support the better sleep steps you take at home.

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The information is shared on condition that readers will make their own determination, including seeking advice from a professional. E&OE.



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