



How to
**SLEEP
BETTER**

EXPERIENCE LIFE



Having trouble nodding off?

Join the club. More than one third of Americans aren't getting enough sleep.

Sleep is essential to our mental and physical health, but we are so used to being sleep deprived “that most of us don’t know what it feels like to be fully alert and awake,” says sleep researcher James Maas, PhD. “People devalue sleep and are completely unaware of what happens to them when they have a deficit.”

When we sacrifice sleep, everything from our personal health, our relationships, and our sense of wonder gets diminished. “Sleep is the food of the brain,” says sleep researcher David Gozal, MD, and “we are starving.”

Eager to get more Zs and reclaim the rest you need?

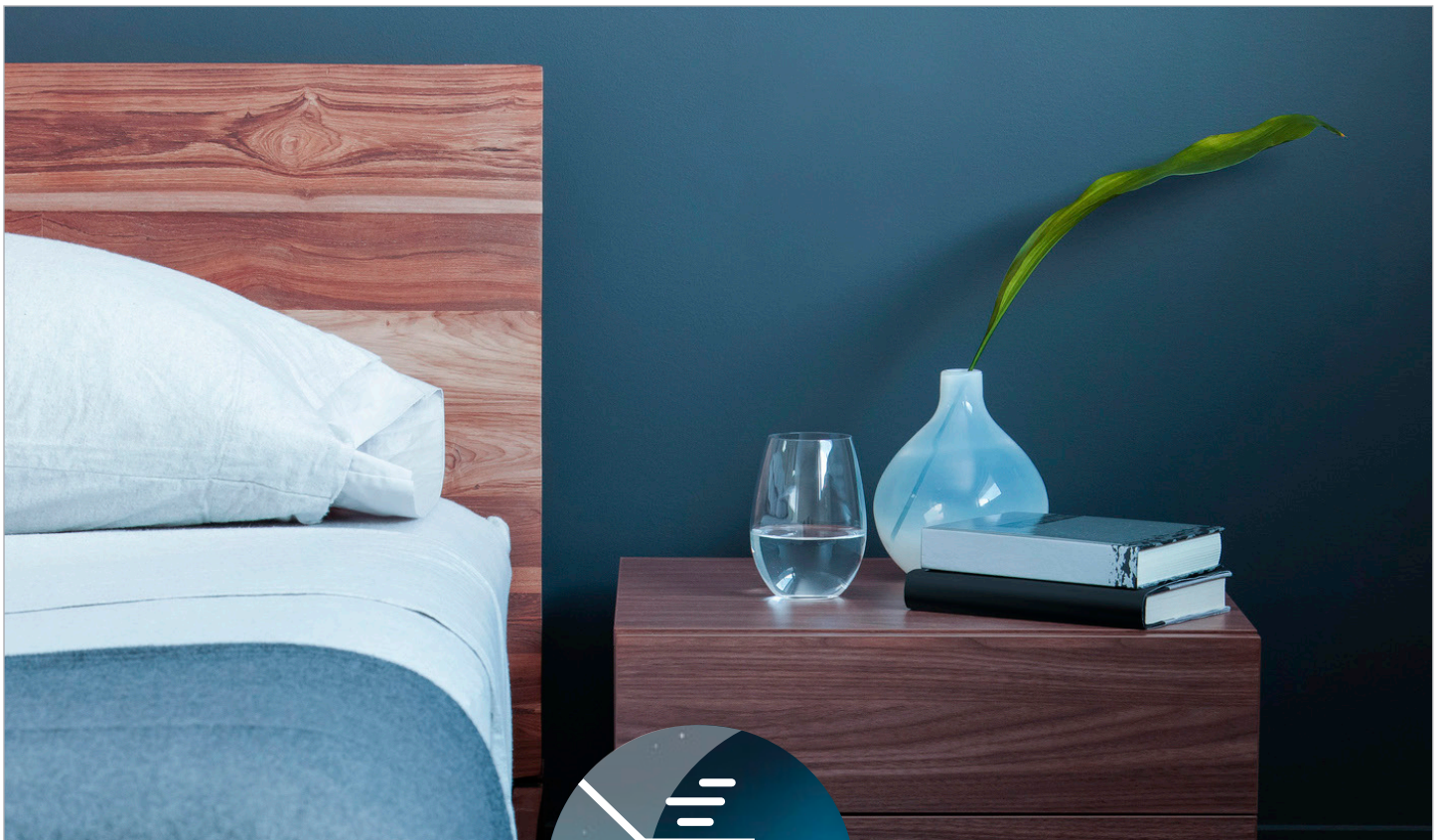
Here are 12 strategies.



1. Stick to a Sleep Schedule

It may not sound fun, but keeping a consistent sleep and wake time — even on the weekends — is the most important thing you can do to establish good sleep habits. Deviating 30 minutes on either side is fine, but that's it — no matter how tempting it is to stay up until 3 a.m. on the weekend and sleep until brunch.

José Colón, MD, MPH, author of *The Sleep Diet: A Novel Approach to Insomnia*, advises not sleeping past 7 a.m. An early-rising routine helps ensure that melatonin will naturally start to rise around 8 or 9 p.m., which helps you grow sleepier in time to knock off by 11 p.m.



2. Lay Off the Caffeine

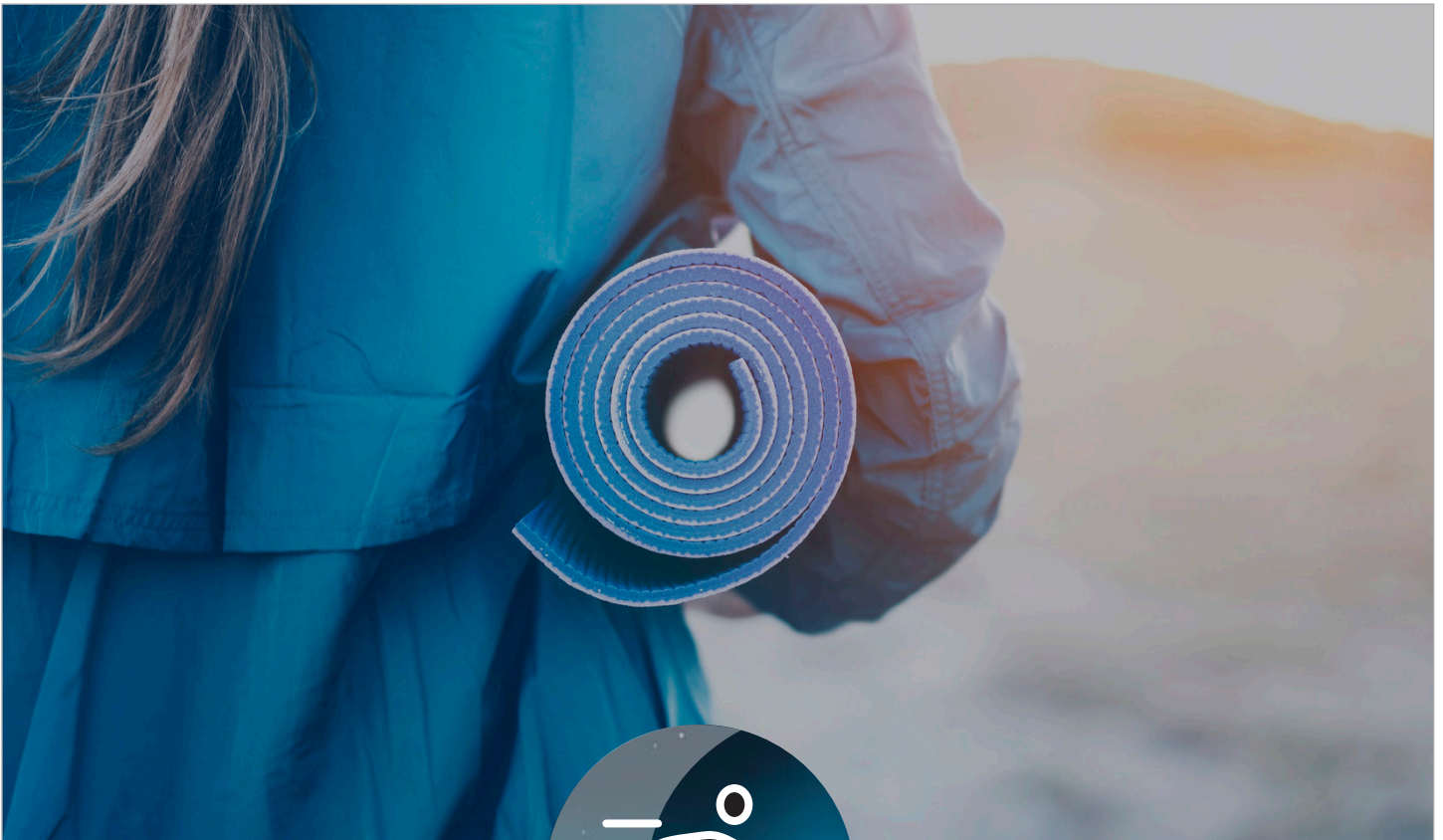
Even in small doses, caffeine can block the neurotransmitters that your body produces to calm you down and make you sleepy.

If you're having sleep issues, try cutting out all caffeinated beverages — even your morning cup of coffee or black tea.



3. Get Some Sun

Natural sunlight helps the body's internal biological clock reset itself each day and release hormones that are vital to healthy sleep. Try to get at least 30 minutes of exposure to natural sunlight daily.



4. Time Your Exercise Wisely

The best time to exercise, says functional-medicine doc Frank Lipman, MD, is four to six hours before falling asleep, but people might be more likely to stick to a routine if they work out first thing in the morning. Try to avoid exercising after 8 p.m., he adds, because it might be too stimulating to your system.



5. Avoid Alcohol Right Before Bedtime

Drinking may reduce the time it takes to fall asleep, but it tends to delay the onset of REM sleep, which studies have shown can translate into less restful sleep overall.

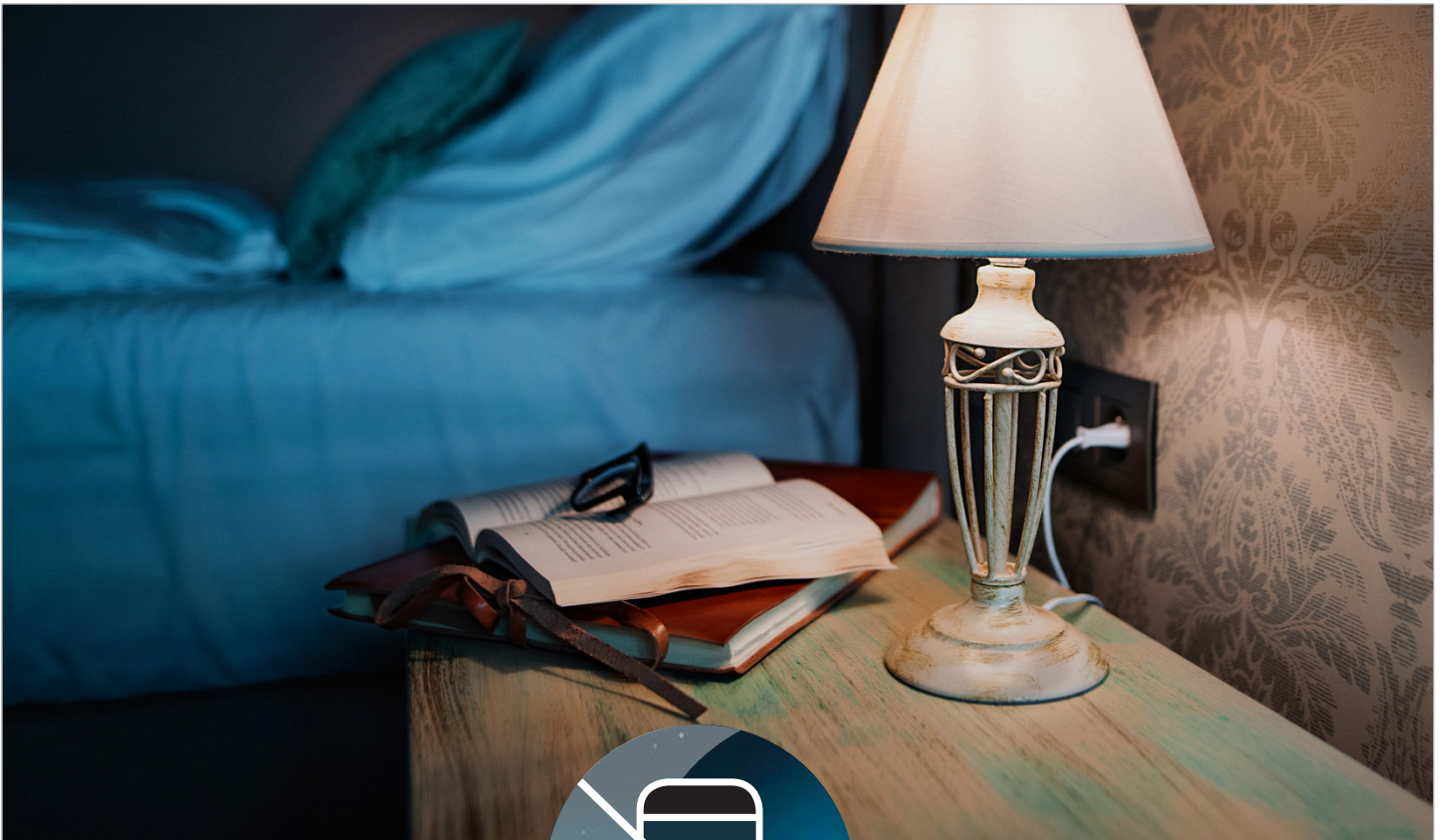
If you're going to imbibe, limit it to one drink with dinner, at least three hours before bed. This gives your body time to process the alcohol well before lights-out.



6. Keep Your Bedroom Cool

The ideal sleeping temperature for most people is between 60 and 65 degrees F.

“Lowering ambient temperature sends a feedback signal to the brain’s sleep center that it’s nighttime, and that it needs to release more sleep hormones,” says Lipman.



7. Create an Electronic Sundown

An hour or two before going to bed, turn off all electronic devices and create an “electronic sundown,” says Lipman. After dark, the blue light from a television, computer, phone, and tablet screen — as well as energy-efficient light bulbs — can be a surprisingly powerful sleep disrupter.

If it's not feasible to shut down all your electronics, try an app that dims blue light on smartphones, tablets, and computers, such as f.lux for Apple or Twilight for Android.

Also, keep lamps on their lowest setting after dinner, and consider getting a red light bulb for the bedroom. Not only does red light look romantic, but the brain associates it with the end of the day and the waning of sunlight.



∞. Develop a Bedtime Routine

Create a relaxing bedtime routine — take a warm bath, read a novel, do some breathing exercises, listen to calming music, or have a cup of herbal tea.

The practice is up to you, but the key is to be consistent. Restorative rituals send a signal to your body clocks about what's coming next — sleep — so they can align.



9. Keep Your Bedroom Dark

Even a little bit of light in the bedroom can interfere with your body's production of sleep hormones. In addition to covering the lights of electronic devices — and don't forget the alarm clock — use light-blocking shades to cover the windows.



10. Ditch the Sleeping Pills

Instead of using sleeping pills, which simply mask underlying problems, try mellowing supplements or herbs, Lipman suggests.

“Magnesium can be helpful, as can calcium and melatonin,” he notes. “The amino acids L-theanine, 5 HTP, taurine, and GABA, and herbs like lemon balm, passionflower, chamomile, magnolia, and valerian root, can also help. Take them about 30 minutes before bedtime.”



11. Clear Your Mind

Don't make bedtime the time to solve all your problems. Make a to-do list for the next day, and then set it aside.

If you wake up with a thought, write it down immediately so you don't toss and turn all night worrying you'll forget.



12. Don't Lie in Bed Awake

If you can't fall asleep within 30 minutes, get out of bed and go to another room. Do something restful until you feel sleepy, and then go back to bed.