

WELL BALANCED

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Mental Health Awareness Month and Better Sleep Month

Sleep HYGIENE FOR Mental HEALTH

Getting enough sleep is one of the best things you can do for your mental health and overall well-being. However, in today's fast-paced world, balancing work, family, and various responsibilities often means that sleep is the first thing we sacrifice. Unfortunately, poor sleep doesn't just take a toll on our physical health, leading to an increased risk for obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and heart disease—it also deeply affects our mental health. Lack of sleep can impair memory, concentration, judgment, and problem-solving and reasoning skills. Over time, inadequate sleep may lead to increased irritability, heightened stress, and a greater risk for developing anxiety or depression. When we deprive ourselves of adequate rest, we also make ourselves more vulnerable to other mental health challenges.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine define adequate sleep as seven or more hours per night. While individual needs can vary based on age and other factors, one-third of people in the U.S. report getting less than the recommended amount. Sleep acts as a reset for your brain, allowing all cognitive functions to operate at their best, including emotional regulation and stress resilience.

Luckily, there are steps you can take to improve your sleep and mental well-being!

Daytime Habits to Promote Better Sleep

- **Exercise regularly.** Elevating your heart rate, strengthening your muscles, and improving your flexibility are important for more than just your physical health. According to Mental Health America, exercise can also improve your sleep quality. However, to avoid disrupting your sleep, schedule intense exercise earlier in the day, as this can sometimes provide a boost of energy, making it challenging to wind down when it's time for bed.



Did You Know?

There's no such thing as "catching up on sleep." Making up for lost sleep is never completely possible—it's best to aim for at least seven hours each night. For more truths about sleep myths, check out this resource from the Better Sleep Council.

- **Make mindful food and beverage choices.** Avoid heavy meals or foods later in the evening that could disrupt digestion and hinder sleep. Additionally, alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine consumed later in the day can interfere with your sleep and prevent you from reaching your sleep goals—it's further recommended to enjoy caffeine in moderation and limit or stop drinking alcohol and using tobacco.
- **Nap responsibly.** While short naps of 20 minutes or less can provide a boost in energy, it's best to aim for a nap earlier in the day, preferably before 5:00 p.m., to avoid disrupting your sleep cycle.
- **Spend time in nature.** Exposure to natural light helps regulate your body's internal clock (the circadian rhythm) and promotes the production of melatonin (the sleep-promoting hormone).

Evening Rituals for a Restful Night

- **Establish a consistent bedtime.** According to the Sleep Foundation, experts recommend going to bed and waking up at the same time each night and morning. This will further support your body's desire to regulate its internal clock.
- **Identify a nighttime routine.** Determining a consistent bedtime is part of a nighttime routine, and further recommendations include finding ways to signal to your body that it's time to unwind and

prepare for rest. This could include taking a warm bath, reading a book, journaling, meditating or listening to light music.

- **Rest your mind.** Are you struggling with racing thoughts and a busy mind when the lights go out and your head hits the pillow? Stress management strategies like mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, or even writing a to-do list or keeping a journal can help you calm your mind and prepare for sleep.
- **Limit your screen time.** Many people choose to wind down with electronics—whether it's television, a phone, or a tablet. However, according to the National Sleep Foundation, research shows that the blue light emitted by these devices can disrupt your sleep cycle. Additionally, "doom scrolling" and consuming media right before bed stimulates your mind, making it harder to relax. To improve your sleep and overall mental well-being, it's recommended to limit screens in the bedroom to reduce temptation and to disengage from screens at least two hours before bedtime. Instead, try relaxation techniques or stress management strategies to help you unwind.

Nighttime Strategies for Optimal Sleep

- **Review your sleep essentials.** When it comes to sleep, comfort matters. Take a moment to assess your mattress, pillow, and nighttime apparel. How do these essentials affect your sleep quality? If discomfort is keeping you awake, it might be time to invest in a new pillow or mattress or consider choosing sleepwear that promotes better rest.
- **Assess the room temperature.** The Better Sleep Council suggests that the ideal room temperature for optimal sleep is between 65 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit, though personal preferences may vary. If temperature is affecting your sleep, consider adjusting your thermostat to find the most comfortable setting for you.

Quiz

Take the Better Bed Quizzz™ for a personalized summary of recommendations and tips to improve your sleep.

- **Create a sleep domain.** In addition to making sure your space is physically comfortable and at the right temperature, create a bedroom that encourages restful sleep. Consider factors like natural light—Does it keep you awake at night or wake you up early? Is the space calming, a place you truly want to sleep? Think about noise levels, too—Do they disrupt your rest? Small adjustments to your sleeping environment can have a big impact on your sleep quality.

If you're getting seven or more hours of sleep each night but still feel tired, find yourself dozing off during the day, struggle with insomnia, or wake up often throughout the night, it might be time to speak with a medical professional.

Resources

- » The Better Bed Quizzz™ (bettersleep.org)
- » Twelve Simple Tips to Improve your Sleep (sleep.hms.harvard.edu)
- » Wake Up to the Truth About Sleep Myths (bettersleep.org)
- » Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit (samhsa.gov)

Sources

- » <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/mental-health>
- » https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2021/20_0573.htm
- » <https://mhalakeshore.org/sleep-for-better-mental-resilience/>
- » <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/making-sleep-a-priority-for-mental-well-being>
- » <https://www.thensf.org/screen-use-disrupts-precious-sleep-time/>
- » <https://bettersleep.org/better-sleep/how-to-sleep-better/>

