How can I get improve my night’s sleep?

You are not alone if you have a hard time with the quality of sleep you get each night BUT **you have much more control over the quality of your sleep than you probably realize.**

Getting good sleep is important for your health and also in managing a vestibular condition.

[Why Sleep Is Important](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=importance+of+sleep+on+vestibular+disorders&btnG=)

Sleeping well directly affects your [mental](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=sleep+effect+mental+health&btnG=) and [physical](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=sleep+effect+health&btnG=) health. Fall short and it can take a serious toll on your daytime energy, productivity, emotional and physical balance, and even your weight.

When you have a vestibular disorder, rest and rejuvenation is imperative to managing your symptoms and improve the quality of your life. In fact, starting with improving your sleep habits may be all it takes to feel more optimal each day.

Here are some suggestions to improve your quality of sleep. It does take some effort but [evidence shows that change can absolutely occur](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=change+a+behavior+sleep&btnG=) with some commitment to our behavioral patterns both during the day and at night.

Experimenting with some suggestions below will help you sleep better at night, boost your brain’s balance and overall health, provide you with more energy and improve how you feel each day.

#1 Be consistent with sleep-wake cycle

Getting in sync with your body’s [natural sleep-wake cycle, or circadian rhythm](https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/biology-of-sleep-circadian-rhythms-sleep-stages.htm), is one of the most important strategies for sleeping better. If you keep a regular sleep-wake schedule, you’ll feel much more refreshed and energized than if you sleep the same number of hours at different times, even if you only alter your sleep schedule by an hour or two.

**Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day.** This helps set your body’s internal clock so it knows when it is time to sleep. If you have to be up at a certain time each day, schedule your bedtime so you are getting the hours your body needs (this is generally between 6-8 hours). If you have other people in your household that disrupt your ability to go to bed at the same time or you feel like you have “more to do” before bed, it may be worth taking some time to strategize how this plan could work for you.

**Avoid sleeping in—even on weekends.** The more your weekend/weekday sleep schedules differ, the worse the jetlag-like symptoms you’ll experience once the return of the weekly routine starts. If you need to make up for a late night, opt for a daytime nap rather than sleeping in. This allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm.

**Be smart about napping.** Limit naps to 15 to 20 minutes in the early afternoon if you have to take a nap, but sticking to getting your sleep at night is suggested.

**Fight after-dinner drowsiness.** If you get sleepy way before your bedtime, get off the couch and do something mildly stimulating, such as washing the dishes, calling a friend, or getting ready for the next day. If you fall asleep on the couch before your bedtime you will disturb your brain’s pattern.

#2 Control your exposure to light & stimulus

[Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone controlled by light exposure](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=melatonin+and+light&btnG=) that helps regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Your brain secretes more melatonin when it’s dark, which makes you sleepy and when it is light out, it makes you more awake. However, many aspects of modern life can alter your body’s production of melatonin and shift your circadian rhythm. Here’s how to influence your exposure to light:

**NOTE If you are light sensitive consider:**

Wearing a hat

Use [FL-41 lenses](https://www.google.com/search?q=fl-41+lenses&oq=fl-41+le&aqs=chrome.0.35i39i457j69i57j0l5j0i22i30.2960j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

Have sunglasses handy at all times

Consider brief but more frequent trips outside

**DURING THE DAY**

**Expose yourself to bright sunlight in the morning.** The closer to the time you get up, the better. The light on your face will help you wake up so eat breakfast near a window or outside if weather allows. If you wake up earlier than the sun consider investing in [light bulbs that bring the sun indoors.](https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALeKk03P4ve7-fOBvymDtS6jcJaAcxxGkw%3A1604855815774&ei=ByioX97WLoLs9AOrvoawDQ&q=indoor+sunlight+bulbs&oq=indoor+sunlight+bulbs&gs_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWIQAzIFCAAQyQM6BAgAEEc6BggAEAcQHjoCCAA6BwgAEBQQhwI6BggAEBYQHlCDP1iOU2CiVGgAcAN4AIABS4gBhwSSAQE4mAEAoAEBqgEHZ3dzLXdpesgBCMABAQ&sclient=psy-ab&ved=0ahUKEwie9sHmufPsAhUCNn0KHSufAdYQ4dUDCA0&uact=5)

**Spend more time outside during the day.** Consider taking your work breaks outside in sunlight, exercise outside, or walk your dog during the day.

**Let as much natural light into your home or workspace as possible.** Keep curtains and blinds open during the day and try to move your desk closer to the window.

**AT NIGHT**

**SUGGESTIONS FOR SAFETY AT NIGHT**

Make sure pathway to bathroom and exits are clear

Invest in [motion activated lights](https://smile.amazon.com/s?k=mr+beams+indoor+motion+sensor+light&crid=3AVPH8PR7IYCH&sprefix=mr+beams+%2Caps%2C236&ref=nb_sb_ss_ts-a-p_1_9) around your home

**Avoid bright screens within 1-2 hours of your bedtime.**[The blue light emitted](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=blue+light+and+sleep&btnG=) by your phone, tablet, computer, or TV is disruptive. You can minimize the impact by using turning the brightness down on your device, or using light-altering software such as [f.lux.](https://justgetflux.com/)

**Say no to late-night television.**Not only does the light from a TV suppress melatonin, but many programs are stimulating rather than relaxing. Try listening to music or audio books instead.

**Don’t read with backlit devices.** Tablets that are backlit are more disruptive than e-readers that don’t have their own light source.

**When it’s time to sleep, make sure the room is dark.** Use heavy curtains or shades to block light from windows or try a sleep mask. Consider covering up electronics that emit light.

**Keep the lights down if you get up during the night.** If you need some light to move around safely, try installing a dim nightlight in the hall or bathroom or using a small flashlight. This will make it easier for you to fall back to sleep.

#3 Exercise during the day

There are many [benefits to sleep and exercising](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=exercise+and+sleep&btnG=) during the day.

* The more vigorously you exercise, the more powerful the sleep benefits. Exercise speeds up your metabolism, elevates body temperature, and stimulates hormones such as cortisol. Try to finish moderate to vigorous workouts *at least* three hours before bedtime.
* [Light exercise](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=light+exercise+and+sleep&btnG=)—such as walking for just 10 minutes a day—improves sleep quality. Relaxing, low-impact exercises such as yoga or gentle stretching in the evening can help promote sleep.
* Try a [meditation walk](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e151991e434bd485427ee72/5e8103e263d7965a88b8178c/5e8a09aa5ad4505403ffed29/1586104793272/Walking+Meditation.mp3)
* It can take several months of regular activity before you experience the full sleep-promoting effects. So be patient and focus on [building an exercise habit that sticks](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/how-to-start-exercising-and-stick-to-it.htm).
* If you believe exercise makes you feel worse, you must change your thinking and dialogue in your brain. [The benefits outweigh the cons on exercise](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=aerobic+exercise+and+balance&btnG=).
  + It is important to ease back into an exercise routine and asking for professional guidance may be helpful. Improving your muscle strength, flexibility, coordination and endurance will improve your resilience.
  + **Set boundaries**. If your symptoms increase from your “baseline” more than 2 levels (go from a 2/10 dizzy to a 4/10 dizzy), take a little break, breathe, hydrate/have a protein snack and if your system can return to baseline within 1 hour, this is a safe place to start. If your symptoms last longer than an hour, it is not hurting you, but it may have been “too much” too soon for your brain. Now you know. If an hour is too long, cut the intensity or duration of your exercise back to reduce recovery time.

#4 Daily nutrition plays a role in how you sleep

Your daytime eating habits play a role in how well you sleep, especially in the hours before bedtime.

**Snacks to help you sleep:**

Small bowl whole-grain, low-sugar cereal

Half a turkey sandwich

A banana or [kiwi fruit](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=kiwi+sleep&btnG=)

Milk or yogurt

[Tart cherry juice](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=tart+cherry+juice+sleep&btnG=)

**Limit stimulants**

**Caffeine** can stay in your system for 8-12 hours**.** [Read more](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0,48&q=caffeine+and+sleep)

**Nicotine**: [Read more](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=smoking+and+sleep&btnG=)

**Avoid big meals at night.** Try to make dinnertime earlier in the evening, and avoid heavy, rich foods within two hours of bed. Spicy or acidic foods can cause stomach trouble and heartburn.

**Avoid alcohol before bed.** [Read more](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=alcohol+and+sleep&btnG=)

**Avoid drinking too many liquids in the evening.** Drinking lots of fluids may result in frequent bathroom trips throughout the night.

**Cut back on sugary foods and refined carbs.** Eating lots of [sugar and refined carbs](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-eating/choosing-healthy-carbs.htm) such as white bread, white rice, and pasta during the day can trigger wakefulness at night and pull you out of the deep, restorative stages of sleep.

#5 Wind down and clear your head

Start a bedtime routine at least 1 hour before your desired bedtime.

Residual stress, worry, and anger from your day can make it very difficult to sleep well. Try to develop a relaxing bedtime ritual to help you prepare your mind for sleep, such as practicing a relaxation technique, taking a warm bath, or dimming the lights and listening to soft music or an audiobook.

Try a [BRAIN DUMP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpo41WGeqFs) before bed

Problems clearing your head at night can also stem from your daytime habits. The more overstimulated your brain becomes during the day, the harder it can be to slow down and unwind at night. Try [focusing on one task at a time](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C48&q=multitasking+effects&btnG=&oq=multitasking+) during the day.

**60 EVERY 60**

Take 60 seconds every 60 minutes to sit or stand tall, take in a few deep breaths, close your eyes or look at something pleasant in the distance (at least 20 feet away from you) and tell your brain “good job” to reward yourself and find a moment of calm and center.

**Breathing techniques**

[Alternate nostril breathing](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=alternate+nostril+breathing)

[Square breathing](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=square+breathing+)

To follow along with a guided deep breathing exercise, here are some [apps suggestions.](https://www.sleepassociation.org/sleep-treatments/sleep-apps/) Yes, you will use your phone but set it up so you do not have to look at your phone for long or set a sleep timer so you don’t have to wake up to turn your phone off.

**Diaphragmatic breathing:** Breathing from your belly rather than your chest can activate the relaxation response and lower your heart rate, blood pressure, and stress levels to help you drift off to sleep.

* Lay down in bed and close your eyes.
* Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
* Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
* Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
* Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

**Body scan**

By focusing your attention on different parts of your body, you can identify where you’re holding any stress or tension and release it. If paying attention to your body and symptoms is not comfortable, consider paying attention to the clothes on your body to have more external focus.

Try a [body scan](https://www.google.com/search?q=body+scan+free&source=lmns&bih=490&biw=1335&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiEgMGCy_XsAhVfATQIHfFuBBcQ_AUoAHoECAEQAA):

* Lie on your back, legs uncrossed, arms relaxed at your sides, eyes closed. Focus on your breathing for about two minutes until you start to feel relaxed.
* Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any tension while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for at least three to five seconds.
* Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. Then move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg. From there, move up your torso, through your lower back and abdomen, your upper back and chest, and your shoulders. Pay close attention to any area of the body that feels tense.
* After completing the body scan, relax, noting how your body feels. You should feel so relaxed you can easily fall asleep.

#6 Create a cozy cave

A peaceful bedtime routine sends a powerful signal to your brain that it’s time to wind down and let go of the day’s stresses. Sometimes even small changes to your environment can make a big difference to your quality of sleep.

Keep your room dark, cool and quiet. Consider [black out curtains](https://smile.amazon.com/s?k=blackout+curtains&crid=A98PQKWHDRN3&sprefix=blackout+c%2Caps%2C297&ref=nb_sb_ss_ts-a-p_1_10).

**Keep noise down.** If you can’t avoid or eliminate noise from neighbors, traffic, or other people in your household, try masking it with a fan or sound machine. Earplugs may also help.

**Keep your room cool.** Most people sleep best in a slightly cool room (around 65° F or 18° C) with adequate ventilation. A bedroom that is too hot or too cold can interfere with quality sleep.

**Reserve your bed for sleeping and sex.** By not working, watching TV, or using your phone, tablet, or computer in bed, your brain will associate the bedroom with just sleep and sex, which makes it easier to wind down at night.

**Make sure your bed is comfortable.** Your bed covers should leave you enough room to stretch and turn comfortably without becoming tangled. If you often wake up with a sore back or an aching neck, you may need to experiment with different levels of mattress firmness, foam toppers, and pillows that provide more or less support.

#7 Ways to get back to sleep

It’s normal to wake briefly during the night but if you’re having [trouble falling back asleep](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/insomnia-causes-and-cures.htm), these tips may help:

**Do not look at the clock.** Try your best to not look at the clock to see what time it is, or how long you have been lying there.

**Stay out of your head.** Hard as it may be, try not to stress over your inability to fall asleep again, because that stress only encourages your body to stay awake. To stay out of your head, focus on the feelings in your body or practice breathing exercises. Take a breath in, then breathe out slowly while saying or thinking the word, “Ahhh.” Take another breath and repeat.

**Make relaxation your goal, not sleep.** If you find it hard to fall back asleep, [try a relaxation technique](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm) such as visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation, which can be done without even getting out of bed. Even though it’s not a replacement for sleep, relaxation can still help rejuvenate your body.

**Do a quiet, non-stimulating activity.** If you’ve been awake for more than 15 minutes, get out of bed and do a quiet, non-stimulating activity, such as reading a book. Keep the lights dim and avoid screens so as not to cue your body that it’s time to wake up.

**Postpone worrying and brainstorming.** If you wake during the night feeling anxious about something, make a brief note of it on paper and [postpone worrying](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/how-to-stop-worrying.htm) about it until the next day when it will be easier to resolve. Similarly, if a great idea is keeping you awake, make a note of it on paper and fall back to sleep knowing you’ll be much more productive after a good night’s rest.

[Beat insomnia](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAGUVH_yIRE)

A picture containing sign, shirt

Description automatically generatedGive some of these suggestions a try for 2 weeks and see what happens. Try not to get frustrated, just trust that your brain will figure out these new patterns if you give it time and space to adjust. Your brain will be thankful that you did! Sweet Dreams!