

wellness lab

New Ways to Sleep Sounder

Too stressed to rest? Here's how to tune out the worries and wake up feeling refreshed and recharged. *By Pam O'Brien*



Sync your alarm to your internal clock for the best z's.

For many of us, getting a decent night's sleep is just a dream right now. According to one survey, 77 percent of people say coronavirus concerns have affected their shut-eye, and 58 percent report they are getting an hour less sleep each night. "We're all under massive amounts of stress, and that significantly affects our ability to sleep," says Nicole Moshfegh, a clinical psychologist in Los Angeles who specializes in the treatment of insomnia and the author of *The Book of Sleep*. But anxiety doesn't have to rob you of your z's. These proven strategies will help you fall—and stay—asples.

MAKE A CLEAN SWEEP

A cluttered bedroom can keep you up at night, according to research by Pamela Thacher, Ph.D.,

a clinical psychologist at St. Lawrence University in New York. "If the bedroom is full of stuff when you walk in at night, most people feel guilty," she says. "Your brain thinks it's time to ignore the clutter, which takes mental effort, or fix the clutter, which takes physical effort." Working from home has made matters worse. "Often the most private, quiet place to work is your bedroom," Thacher says. "Now you've got a laptop and papers in there creating more clutter."

To restore order, get rid of what you don't need, she says. Straighten your workspace at night to signal that the workday is over. Finally, "try to separate your bed from your work area," she says. "Maybe put up a Japanese screen to create a boundary between the two. That tells your brain that your sleeping space is peaceful and sacred."

LISTEN TO YOUR CLOCK

What time you get out of bed is the most important factor for good sleep, Moshfegh says. "Because of the circadian rhythms that govern us, we need to consistently wake up at the same time every day," she says. "If you sleep late, you'll be less tired at night and have trouble falling asleep, which throws off your clock." Get up within an hour of your usual time, no matter what time you went to bed.

CHOOSE FOODS TO HELP YOU SNOOZE

Your gut health and your sleep quality are directly linked, research shows. And what you eat plays

a big role. Probiotics in foods like yogurt, kimchi, and fermented vegetables can improve sleep quality, researchers say. And prebiotics, which our gut bugs need in order to thrive and are in foods like leeks, artichokes, and onions, may promote sleep and also protect us from stress, preliminary research has found. Make these foods part of your diet. And know this: The restorative z's you'll be getting from eating right will also benefit your gut. The sounder your sleep, the better and more diverse your gut microbiome is, according to a recent study from Nova Southeastern University in Florida. ■

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