



Sleep Strategies


*Adapted from an article by **Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.** Sourced from <https://psychcentral.com>*

During the current period of responding to COVID-19, the concept of sleeping well might be as far-fetched as a unicorn sighting. When we are stressed, stretched and working in high stakes environments sleep is usually one of the first things that is sacrificed.

Unfortunately, when we are fatigued and sleep deprived we often are not thinking clearly and can make mistakes. Often as health professionals, we are so focused on our priorities – such as care for our patients that we forget sleep is actually one of them.

Here are some strategies that can improve the quantity and quality of your sleep:

1. **Go beyond the eight-hour rule.** We often hear that eight hours is a must. However, it's actually an average, and you might need more or less to function optimally. **Pay attention to the amount of sleep that's best for you.**
2. **Stop trying.** Many people try to force themselves to fall asleep, especially if they have insomnia. However, because sleep is a biological process, it can't be forced. In fact, often short-term strategies of 'trying to achieve' sleep may actually maintain insomnia in the long-term. **Instead, focus on rest.** Engage in an activity that helps you relax, rather than doing something with the expectation that it will put you to sleep.
3. **Don't compensate for sleep loss.** Avoid trying to 'catch up' on sleep by going to bed earlier or staying in bed later than [you] typically do when the insomnia is not present. That's because this can work against how sleep is regulated and can lead to more frustration.
4. **Take inventory of your habits.** There are some essential rules for sleeping well such as **keeping a routine, with regard to a set wake and sleep time and finding ways to relax at least one hour prior to bedtime.** And then there are the rule breakers, which sabotage your sleep. These include drinking caffeine before bed, working in bed and watching TV in your room. If this sounds familiar, try to banish these sleep stealers.
5. **Understand that sleep changes.** Bad habits aren't always to blame — even if your sleeping problems are recent. Many factors can trigger this, including age, hormones, (e.g., menopause), illness, injury, stress, and environmental changes.
6. **Cultivate healthy habits.** According to Rose, there are various ways you can “build your sleep drive,” such as avoiding naps, exercising during the day and keeping your room dim at bedtime.
7. **Zero in on daytime worries.** We tend to take our daily troubles to bed with us. If you're experiencing anxiety during the day, it's likely that this angst is affecting your sleep. So try to identify and manage worrisome thoughts that may be magnifying nighttime anxiety and inability to wind down.
8. **Keep a sleep journal.** This can help you better understand what's keeping you up at night. Specifically, a sleep diary helps you track sleeping patterns, daily habits, and thoughts. You can



track what time you go to bed, how long it takes you to fall asleep if you wake up during the night and when you finally wake up. Also, record medication and alcohol and caffeine use. One caveat: If you're writing down your thoughts, wait until the morning because waking to record thoughts can be arousing.

9. **Evaluate your work schedule.** The two greatest sleep saboteurs? Long work hours and busy schedules. Consider how you can adjust your schedule to improve your sleep. Sleep deprivation can have serious consequences. It's a significant cause of accidents in those working excessive hours and may also magnify some health conditions and worsen mood.
10. **Challenge and change disastrous thinking.** Often those with insomnia invest a great deal of their energy into catastrophic thinking about the impact of sleep loss such as 'I will lose my job' or 'I will get sick' even if they have very little evidence of either as an imminent danger. While it's fine to acknowledge that a sleepless night is frustrating and you won't be feeling your best, avoid making matters worse by magnifying the impact. This helps in "disempowering insomnia."
11. **Seek a specialist.** If you think you have a sleep disorder, seek out certified sleep centres and professionals certified in behavioural sleep medicine.