

5 Ways to Sleep Better When You're Stressed

Have you ever struggled to get a good night's sleep? If so, you're not alone.

And you may have contributed to the more than \$30 billion dollars spent each year on sleep aids. But what you really need are ways to get better sleep that don't break your bank account—or your health.

Most adults know they feel better when they get enough sleep. But more than that, getting 7-8 hours of sleep most nights will actually help you live longer, according to a consensus of 16 studies including more than 1 million participants.

Adequate sleep helps you handle stress better. Both your body and your mind need those hours to repair themselves physically and mentally. Regularly losing sleep impairs your judgment, makes you more susceptible to certain illnesses and leaves you emotionally vulnerable. I seriously wonder about either the truthfulness or the mental health of those who say they need only three or four hours of sleep a night.

There are many things that may be contributing to your lack of sleep. When you're under stress, you need sleep the most, and it's then that you may find it harder than ever to get the rest you need. Your mind may be ruminating over painful memories, racing with anxious thoughts or trying to figure out how to handle a difficult problem. Your body may be tense and sore. And sleep seems far away.

A rested mind is much more efficient than one that's tired. Different people work best at different times of the day, but don't fall into the trap of thinking that staying up late to push through an important task when you're exhausted is necessarily a good plan. A task you struggle with for four

hours when fatigued you may be able to accomplish in 20 minutes when rested. A problem that felt hopeless at midnight may seem much more manageable after a night's sleep.

Steps to Help You Sleep

So how can you get yourself to sleep when you're stressed? Here are a few strategies:

- **Be regular.** Determine how many hours of sleep you truly need, and be regular about getting to bed early enough to get them. Emergencies do happen, but missing sleep should be the exception. When your stress level is high, it's extra important to keep to your sleep schedule as much as possible.
- **Pay attention to your sleep environment.** A comfortable bed, a cool room and perhaps some white noise, soft music or nature sounds may help you sleep better. Turn off the electronics in your bedroom; the smallest LED light may keep some people from sleeping well.
- **Don't rely on sleep medications.** Those medications—or alcohol—may make you feel as though you're sleeping, but you're not getting the same kind of rest. Your sleep is altered. Instead, try chamomile tea, melatonin or warm milk. Yes, if you like it, warm milk can help you get to sleep.
- **Put your troubles on the shelf.** Write down what you need to remember if necessary. Then before going to bed, visualize putting your work, your anxieties, even your physical pain in a box on the shelf. If your mind wants to keep thinking about them, mentally place them back in the box. You can pick them back up again tomorrow if need be.
- **Put your soul to bed.** Instead of watching TV or checking Facebook, try reading a book for a short time. You can also claim God's promises; pray Psalm 4:8—"I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for You, Lord, make me dwell safely and securely."

Your mind will function better and your problems will seem smaller after some sleep. {eo}

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