

7 Quick Tricks to Sleep Better Tonight by Robin Amster

These sleep hacks can help you catch the best ZZZs possible. Give one a whirl!

Getting a good night's sleep is just a dream for a lot of people—and it takes more than counting sheep to drift off and *stay* snoozin'. While there's certainly no lack of tips for a solid slumber—get plenty of exercise, keep the bedroom at a cool temperature, drink a warm glass of milk—they're often as tired as the sleep-deprived people they're meant to help.

A new generation of sleep hacks—some unconventional, others counter-intuitive—could maybe, just maybe, solve your sleepy-time problems. So kick the jumping sheep to the curb (unless they're working for you, then keep on counting!). Here are seven fresh tips you can try ASAP:

1. Eat to sleep.

Eating before you go to sleep is a no-no... right? Actually, no. Research has found that eating a small portion of food—carbohydrates combined with either calcium or a protein containing the amino acid tryptophan—can lead to a better night's sleep. These food combinations boost serotonin, a brain chemical that helps produce calm. The snack should be eaten about an hour before bedtime.

2. Stay put if you can't doze off.

Conventional wisdom says, if you can't sleep, get out of bed. But it's often better to stay between the sheets. Lie in the dark, head on pillow, and do deep breathing or visualization exercises until you feel drowsy instead.

3. Have a cup of joe.

Caffeine is the enemy when it comes to sleep—or at least that's what you're used to hearing. Yet a UK study found that people who took a “coffee nap”—they drank one to two cups of coffee and then immediately took a 20-minute nap—not only fell asleep but awoke more alert and energized.

4. Smell the ZZZs.

Some scents appear to help people drift into sleep. The smells of lavender, chamomile and ylang-ylang, to name a few, activate the alpha wave activity in the brain, which leads to relaxation and sleepiness. Try mixing a few drops of essential oil and water in a spray bottle and spritz your pillows.

5. Color-correct your bedroom.

The color of bedroom walls can do more than impact a room's aesthetics—it can transform your room into a sleep haven if you choose wisely. Some colors are energizing; others promote drowsiness. White, for instance, curbs melatonin, a hormone that helps the body regulate its sleep-wake cycle, experts say. Better choices include browns or navy blues, which boost the secretion of melatonin instead of reducing it.

6. Forget the warm milk. Say hello to cherry juice.

Studies show that drinking cherry juice improves sleep because it's a natural source of melatonin and tryptophan. So stop by the grocery store on your way home and start pouring yourself eight ounces of tart cherry juice twice a day. Voila!

7. Play mind games.

Don't underestimate the power of your mind—and imagination—to help you fall asleep. Try this: Imagine the night's rest is over and it's time to pop out of bed, jump in the shower, get dressed and leave the house... preferably on a cold, wet day. The contrast between that chilling prospect and a warm, comfy bed might just be enough to induce sleep.