



4 Things to Do Today to Sleep Better Tonight

Women's Health: February 17, 2015

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Put simply, daytime mayhem equals bedtime bedlam.

In a perfect world, your dozing hours look something like this: As you kill the lights, receptors in your eyes signal your body to prep for the sandman. Your brain releases the snooze-inducing hormone melatonin, slows your heart rate, reduces your body temp, and puts a stop order on stimulating stress hormones like cortisol. After you fall asleep, you oscillate between light and deep slumber every 60 to 90 minutes; it's in the latter stage that your cells may fight off illness and recover from injury.

But if you had a hectic day, stress can trigger your brain to pump out excess cortisol, which may hurt your ability to power down, says Natalie Dautovich, Ph.D., an environmental scholar at the National Sleep Foundation (NSF). That means tossing and turning and a racing mind (Is my bank account overdrawn? Is my relationship on the rocks?). It also means you won't reach the deeper, restorative phases of sleep. Come morning, you feel like a vengeful member of The Walking Dead.

It's the stuff of nightmares: **You're so stressed that you can't sleep, which leaves you even more tense the next day. Annnnd... repeat. These genius hacks will help you end the madness—for good:**

See the light. Within five minutes of waking, try to expose yourself to up to 30 minutes of sunlight to give your brain the "It's morning!" signal, says Clete Kushida, M.D., Ph.D., medical director of the Stanford Sleep Medicine Center. Then continue to spend time in sunny spaces: A recent study found office workers who scored natural light during the day got an average of 46 more minutes of sleep per night than daylight-deprived coworkers.

Exercise in the A.M. Not only can early-bird workouts squash cortisol levels for up to 12 hours, but new research shows that people who do 30 minutes of moderate cardio in





the morning fall asleep quicker, snooze for longer, and spend up to 75 percent more time in deep sleep than those who sweat later in the day.

Or get some Oms. Yoga also works, at any hour. The practice is ace at zapping stress, and studies show that dedicated yogis have better overall sleep quality, says Sat Bir Singh Khalsa, Ph.D., an assistant professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

Save carbs for dinnertime. The insulin spike you get from eating fare such as brown rice, yams, or pasta may help you fall asleep faster, per research published in the journal *Cell*. Aim for around 15 to 20 grams at your p.m. meal, about the amount in half a cup of quinoa or whole-grain spaghetti.

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