

Test your sleep savvy

1. A glass of wine before bed helps you sleep well.

False. Alcohol may make you fall asleep more quickly, but it will also wake you up more often during the night.

2. I can catch up on sleep on the weekends.

False. Sleeping in on Sundays won't pay off your sleep debt. And it can be a costly debt: Adults who don't sleep 7 to 9 hours every night of the week are at higher risk for numerous problems, including depression, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, obesity, stroke, substance abuse and traffic accidents.

3. Not getting enough sleep can make you eat more.

True. Lack of sleep can cause an imbalance in the hormones that control appetite. The result can be both hunger and weight gain.

4. Working on your laptop until bedtime won't affect your sleep.

False. Exposure to artificial light after dusk interferes with the production of melatonin, the hormone that induces sleep.

Source: National Sleep Foundation

Sleep better, starting tonight

HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING? Maybe it's time for a wake-up call: You shouldn't toss and turn and hope for the best rest.

A good night's sleep is essential for good health, as many studies have shown. It's not just the amount of sleep that's important either – quality counts too. Without both, people face a higher risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity and depression.

Fatigue affects work, relationships, and the ability to learn and remember. It is such a widespread problem in our sleep-deprived world that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has dubbed lack of sufficient slumber a public health epidemic, linked to car, plane and ship accidents – even nuclear reactor meltdowns.

Slumberland basics

For dreamy nights, take a close look at your sleep environment and habits. These simple tips may help you fall asleep and stay there:

Keep a schedule. Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends.

Dim the lights. Bright lights can interfere with the chemical melatonin, which helps the body grow drowsy and prepare for sleep. That's why experts recommend not watching TV or using a computer right before bedtime.

Keep it cool. Sleep studies suggest that a cool room is best for sleeping. But keep warm covers handy: Middle-of-the-night shivers can shake you awake.

Exercise, but time it well. Regular exercise during the day promotes better sleep, but strenuous activity too close to bedtime can leave the body too revved up for relaxation.

"As simple as it sounds, one of the best tips is to avoid forcing yourself to try to fall asleep," says Marek Martynowicz, MD, a pulmonologist and sleep medicine physician at Providence Sleep Disorders Center. "This only makes falling asleep more difficult. After 15 or 20 minutes of not being able to sleep, it is best to get up and engage in a relaxing activity, such as reading a book or listening to music. Then return to bed once you feel drowsy."

If you continue to have trouble sleeping, talk with your doctor. There are many treatable disorders – including restless legs syndrome and sleep apnea – that can leave you foggy and exhausted, even after hours in bed. Your doctor may recommend a sleep study to diagnose a sleep disorder.



● Marek Martynowicz, MD, pulmonologist and sleep medicine physician, Providence Sleep Disorders Center

If you have concerns about your sleep, a sleep study may help diagnose a sleep disorder. To learn more, call the Providence Sleep Disorders Center at 907-212-3650.