What’s sabotaging your sleep – and how to fix it

If you’re great at falling asleep at night but not so great at staying asleep, then you’re probably left feeling less than rested by the morning. And while you might already know that things like caffeine, alcohol, anxiety, depression, stress and smartphone use can affect your shuteye, you may not be aware of these lesser-known culprits that can interrupt your slumber:

Your medications.

Some drugs, like decongestants, may wake you up at night, keep you awake or make you drowsy during the day. Other examples include beta blockers and diuretics for high blood pressure, corticosteroids for inflammation or asthma, nicotine replacements, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors for depression or anxiety. If you’re having problems sleeping and you’re taking one of these medications, then talk to your doctor. The solution could be as simple as lowering your dosage or changing your prescription. **ALWAYS CONSULT YOUR PHYSICIAN BEFORE MAKING ANY CHANGES TO YOUR MEDICATIONS**

You have allergies.

People with allergic rhinitis or nasal allergies, especially in the spring or the fall, may have difficulty breathing at night. Since allergies cause congestion, it’s likely you’ll wake up or snore. Over-the-counter medications like antihistamines may help symptoms, but it’s important to talk about the options with your doctor since some drugs can aggravate sleep issues.
You live in a big city.
While you may think you’re used to honking, car alarms, sirens and other street noises, those disturbances could be waking you up in the middle of the night and you might not even know it. Noise-canceling headphones or pink and white noise can distract you from the racket outside and provide a sense of calm. Pink noises are sounds with a consistent frequency – like crashing ocean waves, a steady stream of running water or falling rain. White noise is a combination of noise frequencies that together provide a steady background hum.

Your bedroom is too warm.
It's hard to sleep when you're hot – and there's actually some science behind why. When you fall asleep, your body temperature is higher. Throughout the night it drops to what's known as your “core level,” or the lowest it's going to be. This temperature is typically reached about two hours before you normally wake up. But if your room is too warm, then you won't be able to reach that level. Set your thermostat between 60 and 67 degrees. You can also keep your body temperature down by using cotton sheets, which are lightweight and breathe better than other fibers.

Your dog sleeps with you.
More than half of dog and cat owners allow their pets to sleep in bed with them. While cuddling with a pet may comfort you and lower your stress, you might wake up if your cat or dog is scratching, barking, meowing or moving around. And if you have asthma or allergies, your pet can make them worse. If you don’t have allergies, consider letting them sleep in a pet bed next to yours. Then give them extra attention in the morning.

You’re eating foods that keep you awake.
Chocolate, fatty foods, spicy foods, alcohol and caffeine tend to be the biggest sleep disruptors. It's best for your digestion and your sleep to not eat within a few hours of bedtime. But if you can’t make it without a snack, try something healthy like an apple paired with low-fat string cheese or whole-grain crackers and natural peanut butter.
The five-minute bedtime routine you need to try tonight

Good-quality sleep can help control your weight, boost your mood and keep you alert. In addition to powering down your phone, turning off your TV and enjoying a relaxing bath, you may get better sleep by following a simple, pre-bedtime ritual. Here are four quick things to help you relax before turning in for the night:

Learn to love lavender. The purple herb may make you feel calm and sleepy, and it may even ease symptoms of anxiety, depression and fatigue. Try diffusing some lavender essential oils or keeping lavender-packed sachets by your bedside.

Make tomorrow’s to-do list. Don’t let tomorrow’s tasks keep you awake and worrying tonight. Spend a minute or two before bed writing down what you need to do tomorrow or the coming week. It can clear your mind and help you feel more organized and prepared for what lies ahead.

Do some yoga stretches. Yoga can ease tension and put your mind at ease, helping you doze off sooner. Try a supine twist: While lying on your back, bring your knees to your chest. Lower your knees to the left side, while keeping your shoulders, arms and hands on the ground. Turn your head to the right and stay in this pose for 10 to 15 breaths. Switch sides. You can repeat the sequence a few times.

Take a few deep breaths. According to the National Sleep Foundation, just a minute or two of deep breathing can help soothe your nerves and leave you feeling more relaxed. Try this: Sit on the side of your bed with one hand on your lower belly. Count to three as you breathe in, and to three again as you breathe out, making sure you’re attuned to your breath. If you’re feeling any tension, then release that tension as you exhale. Repeat the breathing cycle five times.
*Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Always consult a qualified medical professional before beginning any nutritional program or exercise program.