SLEEP GUIDE

Sleep comes first.

No supplement makes up for a short night. Here is what sleep does for training and recovery, and the habits that protect it.

This is general information for adults and is not medical advice.

7+ hours
What adults need each night, on a regular basis.
Watson 2015

18%
Lower muscle protein synthesis after one night without sleep, in 13 young adults.
Lamon 2021

45 min
Sleep lost to caffeine on average, across 24 studies.
Gardiner 2023

What a short night costs

EARLY STUDIES SUGGEST…

Muscle recovery slows

One night without sleep lowered muscle protein synthesis by 18%, raised cortisol by 21% and lowered testosterone by 24% in healthy young adults. It was a small study of total sleep loss, so read it as a signal rather than a rule.

Sources: Lamon 2021

STUDIES SUGGEST…

Performance drops

A night or more without sleep reduces athletic performance. The effect of a few shorter nights is less clear, and research in women is limited.

Sources: Walsh 2021

STUDIES SUGGEST…

You get sick more easily

People who habitually sleep less than 7 hours a night are more likely to pick up respiratory infections.

Sources: Walsh 2021

Five habits that protect it

Most of the evidence links each habit to better sleep. Fewer trials have tested them one at a time in the general population.

01 **Keep regular hours**
Irregular sleep schedules are linked with more daytime sleepiness and poorer sleep quality. Go to bed and get up at about the same time, weekends included.

02 **Time your caffeine**
Caffeine taken 6 hours before bed can still disrupt sleep, and a cup of coffee needs about 9 hours to stop costing you sleep time. Aim to have 30 mg or less still in your system at bedtime.

03 **Go easy on alcohol**
A drink before bed can help you fall asleep, but it increases waking in the second half of the night.

04 **Skip nicotine**
Nicotine is a stimulant. Its use is associated with taking longer to fall asleep and sleeping less.

05 **Train regularly**
A bout of exercise is likely to bring a modest improvement in that night's sleep.

Sources: Irish 2015, Drake 2013, Gardiner 2023.

More tips, through the day

IN THE MORNING

Same alarm, seven days a week
Set an alarm for the same time every day, weekends and holidays included. A steady wake-up time sets your body clock, so you start to feel sleepy at the same time each night.

Sources: RCPsych · AASM

Count back from your alarm
Work your bedtime out from your alarm, early enough to allow at least 7 hours of sleep.

Sources: AASM · Watson 2015

DURING THE DAY

Last caffeine by 14:00
A simple rule from the Royal College of Psychiatrists: no tea, coffee or anything else with caffeine after 14:00. For a cut-off that fits your own day and the 30 mg target, use the calculator.

Sources: RCPsych · AASM

Nap for under 30 minutes, or not at all
Naps under 30 minutes lift alertness and mood, and in most studies napping did not harm night-time sleep. If you have insomnia, skip them: a nap uses up sleepiness you need at night.

Sources: Irish 2015 · RCPsych

Walk in daylight when you feel sleepy
Bright light, fresh air and movement are powerful ways to stay awake when you flag. A walk around the block gives you all three.

Sources: RCPsych

Finish hard training an hour before bed
Studies do not show that evening exercise harms sleep. The exception is vigorous exercise that ends within an hour of bedtime, so finish hard sessions before then.

Sources: Stutz 2019

IN THE EVENING

Stop work 30 minutes to 2 hours before bed

Set aside 30 minutes to 2 hours before bed with no work, study or anything else that makes you think hard. Do the same few things each night so your brain learns that the day is over.

Sources: RCPsych · AASM

Screens off 30 minutes before bed

Switch devices off at least 30 minutes before bedtime and, if you can, leave your phone outside the bedroom. In a sleep-lab study, people who read on a lit screen before bed took longer to fall asleep than when they read a printed book. The evidence is firmer for children and teenagers than for adults.

Sources: AASM · Chang 2015 · NSF consensus 2024

Keep the lights low

Limit bright light in the evening. Artificial light at night makes you more alert, lowers melatonin and shifts your body clock later.

Sources: AASM · Chang 2015

Warm shower 1 to 2 hours before bed

A warm bath or shower of about 40–42 °C, taken 1 to 2 hours before bed for as little as 10 minutes, shortened the time it took people to fall asleep.

Sources: Haghayegh 2019 · RCPsych

Write tomorrow’s to-do list

Spend 5 minutes writing down what you need to do tomorrow, as specifically as you can. In a sleep-lab study of 57 young adults, those who wrote a to-do list fell asleep faster than those who wrote about tasks they had finished.

Sources: Scullin 2018 · RCPsych

No large meal before bed

Avoid a large meal before bedtime, but do not go to bed hungry either. If you need something, make it a light snack.

Sources: AASM · RCPsych

Ease off fluids before bed

Drink less in the run-up to bedtime, so that a full bladder does not wake you.

Sources: AASM

YOUR BEDROOM

Cool, quiet and comfortable

Keep the room quiet, at a comfortable, cool temperature, and make sure the bed is big and comfortable enough. A room that is too noisy, hot or cold is a common cause of poor sleep.

Sources: AASM · RCPsych

Keep the bed for sleep

Do not work, study or watch things in bed. The aim is for your brain to link the bed with sleep and nothing else.

Sources: AASM · RCPsych

IN BED

Go to bed only when you are sleepy

Going to bed before you are sleepy means lying awake, and teaches your brain that bed is a place for being awake. Wait until you feel sleepy, even if that is later than usual.

Sources: AASM · RCPsych

Awake after 20 minutes? Get up

If you are not asleep after about 20 minutes, get out of bed. Do something quiet in low light, without a screen, and go back only when you feel sleepy.

Sources: AASM · RCPsych

Tense and release, one muscle at a time

Lying on your back, tense one muscle group for about 5 seconds, let go, and wait 10 to 20 seconds before moving to the next. The full sequence takes 10 to 15 minutes. Practise it every night, not only on bad ones.

Sources: RCPsych · AASM guideline 2021

Judge your sleep by how you feel in the day

If you feel well, alert and rested on most days, you are getting enough sleep for you, whatever the number of hours. Everyone has the odd bad night, and the odd bad week.

Sources: RCPsych

These tips help good sleepers stay that way. If you have had trouble sleeping for months, read the insomnia section below: tips alone are not the treatment.

Where supplements fit

Only one ATP product has a stimulant in it: the pre-workout stim. Here is how to use it without paying for it at night.

HOW TO USE THE PRE-WORKOUT STIM AND STILL SLEEP

01 **Use it for morning training**

Take one serving before a morning session, as the label directs. In a 2023 meta-analysis, a pre-workout serving of about 218 mg had to be taken at least 13.2 hours before bed to avoid losing sleep time. For a 22:00 bedtime that means before 09:00.

Sources: Gardiner 2023

02 **After 12:00, go stim-free**

If you train after 12:00 and do not want your sleep affected, use the stim-free pre-workout instead. 200 mg of caffeine at 12:00 still leaves about 50 mg at a 22:00 bedtime, above the 30 mg target.

03 **Count it with your coffee**

It adds to the rest of the day’s caffeine. Enter it in the calculator with everything else you drink, and keep the day under 400 mg.

Sources: EFSA 2015

Caffeine left at a 22:00 bedtime from 200 mg, by when it was taken

06:00	**22 mg**	On target
09:00	**33 mg**	Above target
12:00	**50 mg**	Above target
15:00	**76 mg**	Above target

Check your label for the caffeine in a serving, then use the calculator for your own amount and bedtime. Follow the product label. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, under 18, have a medical condition or take medication, speak to a doctor first.

EARLY STUDIES SUGGEST…

If a short night is unavoidable

Creatine may reduce some of the dip in mental performance during acute sleep loss. It does not replace the sleep.

Sources: Creatine during sleep deprivation: randomized study · Creatine during sleep deprivation: systematic review

If you have insomnia: what psychiatrists and sleep specialists advise

Insomnia is trouble falling or staying asleep even though you have the chance to sleep, with effects you feel during the day. It has its own treatment, and the advice goes further than general sleep tips.

Therapy comes first

Cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is the recommended first treatment for chronic insomnia in adults of any age, including people who have other conditions as well. It can be done in person or through a digital programme.

Sources: ACP guideline 2016 · European guideline 2023 · AASM guideline 2021

Tips alone are not a treatment

Sleep specialists advise against relying on sleep habits alone to treat chronic insomnia. The tips on this page are one part of CBT-I, not a replacement for it.

Sources: AASM guideline 2021 · AASM

Tablets are a short-term second step

When CBT-I has not worked well enough, a medicine can be added, decided together with your doctor. Guidelines keep sleeping tablets short-term, usually four weeks or less, and some can be addictive. They do not recommend antihistamines, herbal remedies or fast-release melatonin for insomnia. If you take anything regularly to sleep, tell your doctor.

Sources: European guideline 2023 · ACP guideline 2016 · RCPsych

WHAT THE THERAPY INVOLVES

CBT-I is simple to learn, though some of the techniques take a bit of work. These are the main ones, as the Royal College of Psychiatrists describes them.

01 **Make bed mean sleep**

Use the bedroom only for sleep and getting dressed. Go to bed only when sleepy, and leave the room if you cannot sleep. This works slowly: expect several weeks, and you may sleep a little worse before you sleep better.

Sources: RCPsych · AASM guideline 2021

02 **Spend less time in bed**
Many people with insomnia go to bed far too early, which gives them more time to lie awake. Choose the earliest bedtime you are comfortable with and move it 15 minutes later each week, until you fall asleep within about 20 minutes and are awake for no more than about 20 minutes in the night. Then try moving it 15 minutes earlier each week.
Sources: RCPsych · AASM guideline 2021

03 **Loosen the worry about sleep**
Worrying about not sleeping can keep insomnia going long after the stress that started it has passed. CBT-I teaches more helpful ways of thinking about sleep and responding to a bad night.
Sources: RCPsych

04 **Learn to relax on purpose**
Relaxation, such as tensing and releasing each muscle group in turn, is practised every night until it becomes a skill.
Sources: RCPsych · AASM guideline 2021

INSOMNIA AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Poor sleep and low mood feed each other
People with insomnia are about twice as likely to go on to develop depression as people who sleep well. If you feel very low or anxious, or cannot stop thinking about your problems, speak to your doctor.
Sources: Baglioni 2011 · RCPsych

Check your medicines
Some medicines disturb sleep, and so can stopping a medicine such as an antidepressant. Ask your doctor whether yours could be involved before you change anything.
Sources: RCPsych

This section summarises published guidance and does not replace seeing a doctor. Do not start, stop or change a medicine without speaking to your doctor.

When to see a doctor

Good habits do not fix a sleep disorder. Speak to your doctor if you have:

- Loud snoring, or pauses in breathing that someone else has noticed
- Sleepiness during the day despite enough time in bed, especially while driving
- Trouble falling or staying asleep at least three nights a week, for three months or more
- An urge to move your legs at night that keeps you awake

About this guide

This is general information for adults and is not medical advice.
It is a general guide, combined from the published sources listed below. It does not replace advice from your doctor, who knows your health and your medicines.

Sources

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