Better Sleep Tonight!

Good health is closely linked to how well you snooze. Learn ways to get quality shut-eye—and wake up energized.

BY SARAH DIGIULIO

THE RESEARCHER SAYS...
Pay attention to what and when you're eating

One standard answer to "What can I eat to sleep better?" focuses on avoiding spicy and fatty food, or too much food, right before bedtime. And it's true that both of these can trigger heartburn and indigestion, which may worsen when you're lying in bed and make it difficult to sleep. Having caffeine or alcohol late in the day and in the evening can also be disruptive. But recent research suggests that the timing of eating may be important for other reasons. It takes a few hours after you eat for your body to shift from digesting and storing nutrients into sleep mode. Having your last meal of the day fairly early and avoiding food for a few hours before bed allows for the shift and may help you sleep better.

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THE ALLERGIST SAYS...
Consider your environment

Poor shut-eye may be explained by allergies, especially to pets, dust, and mold indoors. Itchy eyes, congestion, runny nose, and postnasal drip can prevent you from falling asleep or wake you up during the night. To figure out if allergies are the culprit, pay attention to whether there's a seasonal pattern (indoor allergies can worsen in the winter when you spend more time in closed spaces that aren't aired out) or a pattern with certain exposures. An allergist can also help determine the trigger. An over-the-counter fix like an antihistamine or a nasal spray may ease symptoms, as can changes like keeping pets out of the bedroom and washing sheets weekly in hot water.

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THE SLEEP MEDICINE DOC SAYS...
Get to the root of the problem

Many variables can keep us from getting the sleep we want. You likely already know that a bad night's rest is often the result of behaviors known to disrupt sleep, like reading on your cell phone before bed or logging an intense workout late in the evening. But if cleaning up those habits isn't helping and your sleep problems last for a month or longer, chronic insomnia may be the issue. At that point, it can be helpful to see a sleep specialist, who might recommend cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or another treatment to get you back on track. In most cases, sleep will improve if you find and address what's actually hindering it—whether that's anxiety or something else.

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