

7 solutions for sleepless situations

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Seven solutions for sleepless situations.

1. You can't fall asleep.

Don't stay in bed. It turns your sanctuary into a torture chamber and actually decreases your [sleep](#) drive, said Zee. Instead, practice good "sleep hygiene" by reducing your caffeine intake, exercising (but not too close to bedtime) and avoiding stimulating activities, such as TV and computer use. Resist the urge to knock yourself out with wine, because alcohol prevents [deep sleep](#). If anxiety is keeping you up, keep the lights dim, get out of bed and listen to music, talk radio or an audio book with your eyes closed. Go back to bed when you feel drowsy.

2. You wake up in the middle of the night.

Don't turn on the light. This "tells the brain it's morning and it stops producing [melatonin](#)," said and sleep expert Michael Breus. Don't go to the bathroom simply because you're awake. Instead, he said, distract your monkey mind by counting backward from 300 by 3s_ that requires more calculation than counting sheep. If you wake up within an hour of the time you're supposed to get up, then just get up, said Breus. "If you stay in bed longer than 30 or 40 minutes, your body could push you back into a deep sleep," he said.

3. Your bladder wakes you up.

Don't drink liquids after 8:30 p.m. If you're worried you might be thirsty

in the middle of the night, put a small cup of water near your bed so you don't have to get up. You probably won't need it, said Breus, the author of "Beauty Sleep" (Plume, \$15). If you're male and feel pressure on your bladder, have your prostate checked.

4. You have PMS symptoms or are menopausal.

Don't panic; it's normal for a woman's fluctuating or decreasing hormone levels to cause insomnia, said Rebecca Booth, an obstetrician-gynecologist and author of "The Venus Week" (Da Capo, \$24). Booth suggests taking melatonin supplements (3 to 5 milligrams) and curbing the carbs to keep insulin levels down. A [yoga](#) pose or meditation can calm adrenaline that spikes when hormones drop during PMS. "Nut butters are often high in tryptophan, an amino acid that helps induce sleep," Booth said.

5. You're taking medications.

Don't be shy about talking to your doctor about your medications. About 1,000 drugs (including antidepressants, cough and cold remedies, and statins) can make you feel wired, said Suzy Cohen, author of "Drug Muggers" (Dear Pharmacist Inc., \$29.95). Try taking antidepressants in the morning (unless they have a sedative effect). Cymbalta, Sinequan or Desyrel are more sedating than Wellbutrin, Zoloft and Paxil, said Cohen. If insomnia persists, ask your doctor for a lower dosage. Getting more sleep can help with depression.

6. You have Sunday night insomnia.

Anxiety plays a huge role for many, but another problem is staying up too late on Friday and Saturday. "Then the body wants to stay up later on Sunday too," said Breus. "If you stay within 45 minutes to an hour of your normal bedtime it should diminish," he said.

7. You're truly a night owl.

Don't fight it. But if you can't work the night shift, try to go to [bed](#) and wake up around the same time every day, said sleep expert Jodi Mindell, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "Don't let yourself drift on weekends or else it will be very hard to get back on schedule. Also, get out in the bright light first thing in the morning, as this will also help entrain your internal clock to an earlier schedule."

You know better, but after tossing and turning for hours, you give up and look at the clock: It's 2:14 a.m.

Panic ensues. "How will I function on four hours of sleep?" you wonder. "What if I only get three hours?"

Sleep, they say, is for the weak; something we can do when we're dead. But few things will wreck your life faster than the side effects of sleep deprivation, which include foggy-headedness, irritability, depression and problems with memory, judgment, focus and coordination. A lack of shut-eye also can make you fatter and increase your risk of diabetes, heart attack, high blood pressure and hyperactivity. And did we mention it's a form of torture that leads to psychosis?

"It's time to think about sleep much like we think of nutrition and exercise," said Phyllis Zee, a neurologist and director of the Sleep Disorders Center at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "It's important for our overall health."

Although we spend one-third of our lives sleeping, many of us don't do it very well. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine says about one in five adults fails to get the necessary seven to eight hours a night, and the economic downturn is making things worse.

The trick to catching this elusive bedfellow is learning how to let it come to us. Here are seven situations that often lead to sleepless nights_and seven solutions for luring the sandman back to your side.

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