

Tips on insomnia, snooze buttons, hot baths, putting phones away and more

August 28 2015, by Bob Shepard

Have trouble sleeping or waking up? You are not alone. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine estimates 30-35 percent of adults complain of insomnia. It is common in groups such as older adults, women, people under stress, and people with certain medical and mental health problems.

Amy Amara, M.D., Ph.D., a neurologist and [sleep](#) medicine physician at the University of Alabama at Birmingham says there are a host of factors that can disrupt sleep; but she also offers some suggestions that can help you catch those elusive Z's.

Amara, who sees patients at the UAB's Sleep/Wake Disorders Center, says the bottom line to waking up refreshed is to get enough hours of sleep. Easier said than done.

"Cooler environments are helpful for promoting sleep," Amara said. "A hot bath just before bedtime may be helpful because the body temperature decreases quickly after getting out of the tub, thus promoting sleep. The best sleep environment is cool, dark and quiet."

Amara also recommends a consistent exercise program, which helps make sleep less fragmented and promotes alertness during the daytime. A regular program is important, because a single day of vigorous exercise can sometimes disrupt sleep that night. The type of exercise is less important—find something you like to do, and stick with it.

If you are consistently waking up groggy, or hitting the snooze button many times, Amara says going to bed earlier can help; but be sure to optimize your ability to sleep by reserving your sleeping space for just sleep. No TV, no reading, and no electronics in or near the bed. Your smartphone can wait until you get up.

For some sleep issues, a visit to a sleep medicine physician is valuable. Sleep professionals can help individuals understand their body's preferred [sleep time](#) and needs. Tools such as sleep diaries can be helpful. Sleep physicians can also help with more complicated issues such as [circadian rhythm disorders](#).

"Light is definitely an alerting signal to help you wake up, but the timing of light exposure is very dependent upon the individual," Amara said. "If the light is given at the wrong time, it can actually end up making it harder for you to wake up or can shift the circadian rhythm in the wrong direction. A [sleep medicine](#) doctor can assist in providing a plan to shift the rhythm in the right direction."

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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