

The importance of sleep health:

Are you getting enough z's?

Alessandra Stasnopolis, RDN, LDN

There is much emphasis placed on eating a balanced diet and moving your body to maintain health, but what about your sleep hygiene? One in three adults in the US report not getting enough sleep.

Chronic sleep deprivation may impact your ability to focus during work, at home or when driving; worsen your mental well-being, negatively affect your social relationships and even harm your physical health. Sleep deficiency is also linked to high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, heart disease, kidney disease, anxiety and many other chronic conditions.

How much sleep do I need?

Adults between 18-64 need an average of 7-9 hours of sleep per night, and those 65 and older need 7 to 8 hours. One of the best indicators that you are getting enough sleep is that you feel alert during the day.

Tips to help you get your best sleep

Winding down

Maintaining a routine before bed and focusing on calmness techniques can help with falling and staying asleep:

- Hot shower a few hours before bed
- Nightly self-care routine
- Evening meditation, breathing exercises or mindfulness
 - Download the [Headspace app](#) (free for BSW team members and up to two family members 18+) for sleep-inducing content
- Evening stretching or gentle yoga
- Evening reading or journaling



- Reduced screen time (especially cellphone and laptop) close to bedtime or the use of blue light glasses

Light exposure and temperature

Your exposure to light during the day and darkness at night can impact your ability to fall asleep:

- Blue light close to bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep.
- Sunlight in the beginning and middle of the day can help with falling asleep at night.
- Sleeping in a dark room that is cool can help with falling asleep.

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Nutrition for sleep

What you eat may help or hinder your sleep.

Foods and drink that can help with sleep

- **Tryptophan**
 - Dairy, nuts, seeds, turkey, honey, bananas and eggs are rich sources of this amino acid
- **Carbohydrates**
 - Dairy, produce and whole grains are carbohydrate rich and may help you fall asleep
- **Magnesium**
 - Milk, bread, nuts, legumes, tofu, seeds, salmon, cherries, prunes, leafy greens and whole grains help make you sleepy
- **Foods that help us make the sleep hormone melatonin**
 - Tart cherries, eggs, milk, fish, nuts and goji berries may help you make more natural melatonin

Foods and drink that can hinder sleep

- **Alcohol intake**
 - Daily or excessive intake can impact sleep habits.
 - Drinking alcohol too close to bedtime (4-6 hours before) may also impact sleep.

- **Caffeine, especially past noon, can impact your ability to fall asleep**

- If you are caffeine sensitive, reduce your intake of coffee, tea, energy drinks, chocolate and pre-workout supplements in the afternoon and evening.
- You can also try lower caffeine teas like green or white tea, decaf coffee, and caffeine free teas (herbal teas) to see if these help or hinder your sleep.

When to talk with your doctor about sleep

If you notice any changes in your sleep or experience an increase in fatigue, it can be a sign of vitamin D, iron, or B12 deficiency, sleep apnea, anxiety, depression, and many other conditions. Be sure to talk with your doctor about any changes you notice in your energy levels.

Looking for sleep support? Connect with a Baylor Scott & White wellness coach. [Schedule your appointment today.](#)