



Dr. Garrett's Top Sleep Recommendations

Stick to a Consistent Sleep Schedule

Keeping a consistent bedtime and wake time, even on weekends, helps regulate the body's circadian rhythm. Irregular sleep patterns disrupt hormonal balance, impair memory and concentration, and increase the risk of chronic health conditions. This "social jetlag" effect is especially common in shift workers and young adults, and is linked to poorer academic performance and metabolic health issues.

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Create a Cool, Dark, and Quiet Sleep Environment

Temperature, lighting, and noise all significantly affect sleep quality. The optimal room temperature for sleep is around 65°F (18°C), which helps support melatonin production and reduce wakefulness. Light, especially artificial or ambient light, can suppress melatonin and delay sleep onset. Reducing noise and using blackout curtains or white noise machines can further enhance sleep depth and continuity.

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Avoid Caffeine and Alcohol Before Bed

Caffeine can remain in the body for up to 8 hours, blocking adenosine (the sleep pressure hormone) and delaying sleep onset. Alcohol may initially cause drowsiness but ultimately disrupts REM sleep and increases nighttime awakenings, reducing restorative sleep. Ideally, stop drinking caffeine after Noon.

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Limit Screen Time Before Bed

Electronic devices emit blue light, which suppresses melatonin and shifts circadian timing. Exposure to screens in the hour before bed is associated with increased sleep latency and reduced next-day alertness. Reducing evening light exposure, especially from phones and tablets, helps signal the body that it's time to sleep. Setting your smartphone to grayscale has been shown in research to reduce daily screen time, particularly for social media use, by dulling the phone's visual appeal and increasing users' self-awareness and control.

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Exercise but Not Too Late in the Day

Exercise improves sleep quality by reducing sleep onset latency and increasing time spent in deep sleep. However, intense physical activity within 1-2 hours of bedtime may interfere with falling asleep by raising body temperature, adrenaline, and heart rate. Morning and early afternoon workouts are generally most beneficial for sleep, but evening exercise can still be helpful if it doesn't disrupt your wind-down routine.

References:

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Don't Stay in Bed Awake

If you're unable to fall asleep within 20-30 minutes, get out of bed and engage in a quiet, relaxing activity in low light. This technique, called stimulus control, helps prevent the brain from associating the bed with stress or frustration. Returning to bed only when sleepy strengthens the mental connection between bed and sleep.

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Avoid Long or Late Naps

Napping can be restorative, but naps longer than 30 minutes or taken late in the day can reduce sleep pressure and interfere with nighttime sleep. Short power naps earlier in the day (10-20 minutes) offer cognitive and energy benefits without disrupting the natural sleep cycle.

References:

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Don't Rely on Sleep Aids or Melatonin Routinely

Sleep medications and over-the-counter aids like melatonin can be helpful short-term but are not recommended for regular use. Sedative hypnotics may alter sleep architecture, increase fall risk in older adults, and have been linked to higher mortality in long-term users. Behavioral approaches like CBT-I are safer and more effective for chronic insomnia.

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Prioritize Sleep as Essential for Health

Sleep is not optional. It is foundational to mental, physical, and emotional health. Inadequate sleep increases the risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, cognitive decline, and weakened immune function. Reframing sleep as a biological necessity rather than a luxury can shift both personal and societal attitudes toward rest.

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Watch Your Sugar Intake, Especially Later in the Day

Eating refined sugar, particularly in the afternoon or evening, can interfere with your ability to fall and stay asleep. That's because sugar causes spikes in hormones like serotonin and melatonin, both of which play a big role in your sleep-wake cycle. Having sweets too late in the day can make you feel more alert at bedtime, delay when you fall asleep, and lead to lighter, more restless sleep overall.

If you're craving something sweet, try to enjoy it earlier in the day, ideally before mid-afternoon. In the evening, opt for more sleep-friendly options like fruit or snacks that won't disrupt your body's natural rhythm.

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