

The good **sleep** equation

From seven hours of kip and six minutes reading to 10 deep breaths, Elizabeth Archer discovers what really adds up to ensure a restful night's sleep

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FOR years, we've been told that eight hours of sleep is the key to a good night's rest – but research has discovered that's too much.



According to a study by Cambridge University and Fudan University in China, seven hours of shut-eye is the optimal amount, boosting mood, memory and attention span.

“Think quality of sleep rather than quantity,” said psychologist Dr Sue Peacock (againinthemind.co.uk).

“It's better to have fewer hours of good sleep than eight hours of broken sleep.”

Here, our experts reveal what adds up to a good night's rest.

20... MINUTES OF DAYLIGHT

“Light and dark exposure is the biggest factor in setting our circadian rhythm,” said Kathy McCarthy, health coach for Able (ableapp.com).

“Exposure to daylight kickstarts our body's processes and gives us a natural feeling of sleepiness around 14 hours later.”

Try having your breakfast outside, or sitting near a window to maximise the amount of natural light you get first thing. If you work shifts, try sitting by a SAD lamp for the same effect.

Try Beurer TL20 SAD lamp, £59.99 (lloydspharmacy.com).

30... GRAMS OF FIBRE

New research suggests fibre benefits sleep.

“Eating the right amount of fibre can improve sleep quality and even increase the time we spend in deep sleep stages, which is crucial to feeling rested and refreshed,” said psychologist Ieva Kubiliute (oliolusso.com).

The NHS recommends eating 30g of fibre each day, from high-fibre breakfast cereal, oats, wholegrains, pulses, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

6... MINUTES OF READING

Before you go to sleep, you should put down your phone and pick up a book instead.

“A University of Sussex study showed it can take just six minutes of reading at bedtime to significantly relax you and lower stress levels by 68 per cent,” said Steve Adams, sleep expert at mattressonline.co.uk. “Stick

to books with lighter subject matter to avoid overstimulating your brain before sleep and focus on breathing while you read,” Steve added.

18... DEGREES ROOM TEMPERATURE

The optimal temperature for bedrooms is 18C.

“Our bodies are programmed to decrease in temperature in the evening, so having a cool room is essential for quality sleep,” said Alison Jones, sleep expert for Sealey (sealey.co.uk). “Keeping bedroom curtains closed during the day prevents heat buildup.”

Opt for lightweight breathable fabrics for your pyjamas and bedding, too.

10... DEEP BREATHS

“Taking yoga breaths before bed balances your nervous system,” said yoga and sleep specialist Lisa Sanfilippo (triyoga.co.uk). “The breath lowers heart rate, dissolves tension in the body and allows the brain to change from ‘tension and stress’ to ‘rest and sleep’ mode. First, place your hands on your lower belly.

Breathe in deeply but gently, while letting your belly muscles expand.

“When you exhale, let your belly muscles relax and imagine you can feel the tiny muscles around the bones in your lower back release towards the floor. Do this 10 times.”

10... MINUTES OF CALMING SOUNDS

“When we sleep we want to feel at ease and safe,” said Smriti Joshi, psychologist at mental health app Wysa (wysa.io). “Sounds such as rain, waves and rustling trees are soothing.” Try listening to nature sounds for 10 minutes before you sleep, or search online for a Vedic chant.

Eating right fibre can improve sleep

90... MINUTES BEFORE TRYING AGAIN

Dr Peacock said: “Often we will wait until the end of a television programme or finish the chapter of a book, even though we feel a wave of sleep coming on.

“By the time it’s finished, we don’t feel sleepy any more.”

Try waiting 60–90 minutes until you feel sleepy again.