- Sleep



14 WAYS

TO SLEEP BETTER

Sleep smarter with tips from our experts on disrupting negative thoughts, banishing nightmares, the sleep-eat cycle and sleep detoxing, plus handy products to help you drift off.

COMPLIED BY ANGELA KENNEDY. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK.

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1 STOP NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

'Affirmations are great tools for interrupting negative thought patterns and for strengthening the beliefs that serve you. An affirmation is simply a positive declaration of intent. Reading affirmations or saying them out loud can have a powerful effect on your mental state, and if you say them in the alpha- and theta-rich brain wave states as you're falling asleep, the effect is supercharged,' says sleep and dream expert Charlie Morley (charliemorley.com). 'Choose an affirmation, working with one at a time, and repeat it around 10 times before you go to sleep. If you can, try to recite it as you enter the hypnagogic state, that drowsy stage you experience just before you fall asleep,' says Charlie. Try these:

- 'I release today and relax deeply into sleep.'
- 'May my sleep be peaceful and my mind at ease.'
- 'All is well. I am safe and relaxed.'
- 'Nothing to do, nowhere to go, resting.'





2 Nap clever

'If you find napping tricky, try hypnagogic mindfulness or yoga nidra instead. These two approaches are very similar and can be likened to the traditional body scan found in mindfulness meditation,' says Charlie. 'Both are great ways to recharge your batteries and rest deeply without actually sleeping. A wide range of sessions are free online, via apps like Insight Timer or on the resources page of my website (charliemorley.com/resources). Plus, body-focused mindfulness practices such as yoga nidra are much safer for people working with trauma, while offering the same neurological benefits as standard mindfulness meditation.'

3 BREATHE COHERENTLY

By simply breathing much more slowly than usual you can help improve the quality of your sleep. You can perform the technique sitting at your desk, on your commute or on a walk in the park. Evidence shows coherent breathing significantly improves the symptoms of anxiety disorders, PTSD, trauma, stress-related disorders, inflammation, depression and troubled sleep.

Another remarkable benefit is that it may have a similarly detoxifying effect on the brain as deep sleep. This is due to the increased blood flow that it creates.

Breathing at five breaths a minute synchronises the electrical rhythms of your heart, lungs and brain, which can lead to a state in which you are both relaxed and alert. Follow the six-second inhale and exhale rate with an audio track that synchronises your breathing to repeating chimes. Find tracks at charliemorley.com.

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4 Imagine protectors around you

Inspired by a Tibetan practice, this is helpful for anyone with nightmares, night terrors or pre-sleep anxiety. The Tibetan teachings say if you feel scared or anxious before you sleep, turn your sleeping area into a sacred protected space by imagining being surrounded by powerful protectors, "like mothers watching over a child, or guardians surrounding a king or queen". 'Visualise anyone or anything who offers you a feeling of love, safety and protection. Protectors can be living or dead, real or unreal, superheroes or Buddhas, mythical warriors or religious symbols – be creative!' says Charlie.

'When you go to bed, decide who your protectors will be and imagine them standing or sitting around your bedside. Allow yourself to fall asleep imagining they are protecting you – feel their love, care and safety. If there are spaces in your circle, you can fill the gaps with fairy lights, stars, fire, crystals, animals, or whatever brings you safety. Do this each night, if you like, or as and when required,' advises Charlie.

5 Optimise your sleep-eat cycle

'Keep food away from sleep by finishing your evening meal at least two hours before you go to bed to help with digestion. Evening meals should be light and easy to digest. A soup or a bowl of steamed vegetables is a great option. Some people even thrive on a protein smoothie as an evening option to ease digestion and prepare for the overnight fast,' says Bridget Hancock, naturopathic nutritionist and author (bridgetlouisenutrition.com).

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6 Try journalling

'Take a few minutes to journal your thoughts at the end of the day. Letting go of the day's anxieties, practical concerns and general information shifts you towards restful sleep,' says Bridget.

7 Relax your body

Add Epsom salts and lavender drops to a warm bath to unwind, and apply magnesium oil to relax your muscles after your bath.

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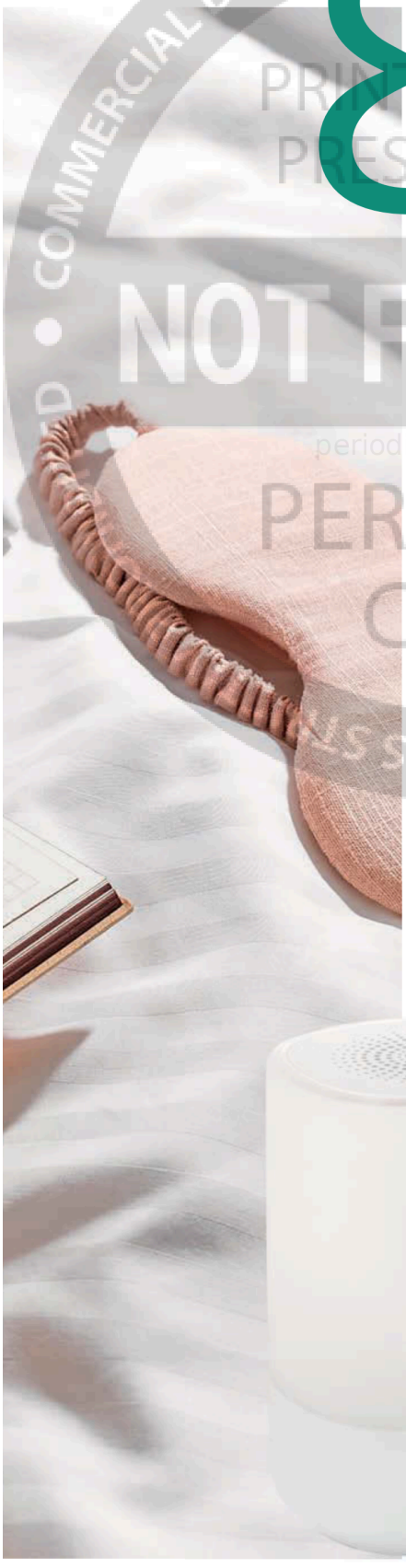


8 Avoid alcohol

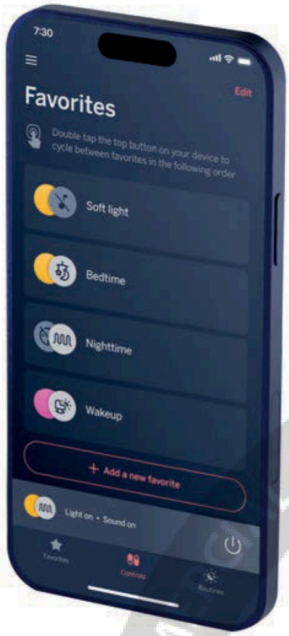
'It is often easier to get to sleep after drinking alcohol, but once it is broken down in the body, it almost balances out the initial feeling of deep sleep by giving you lighter, lower-quality, disrupted sleep,' says Bridget.

9 RESTORE BALANCE TO YOUR BODY

Try the **EarthFlow Fitted Grounding Sheet** (from £118, earthflow.co). The bedding combines 100 per cent organic cotton with conductive silver fibres, connecting to the ground port of standard home electrical outlets to channel the Earth's natural charge, without using any electricity. The Earth's surface has a subtle negative electrical charge which, when it makes contact with your skin via the sheet, the company claims can soothe inflammation, reset cortisol and help you fall to sleep faster.







10 SLEEP SOUNDLY

Another way to drift off gently is with the **Nanit Sound + Light** (£99, nanituk.co.uk), which uses light and sound to create routines that soothe and encourage good sleep. It has a clever app to allow you to personalise your sleep routine settings. Originally designed as a baby monitor, the device's customised soundtrack library and sleep-inducing light combinations made it a hit with the grown-ups too!

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Wise words

'The Buddhist teachings say that the mind with which we fall asleep flavours the whole night that follows,' says Charlie.



SWITCH OFF

'In terms of stimulation, staring at a screen is the equivalent of looking at the sun right before you want to sleep,' says Bridget. 'This is why we need to avoid screen time an hour before bed, as blue light triggers cortisol release, interferes with melatonin release and disrupts your natural circadian rhythms. If you must use your computer in the evenings, consider installing a blue light blocker such as Iris (iristech.co) or get some blue light-blocking glasses to wear.'

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Try a sleep-inducing hot choc!

A warm mug of cocoa has long been a bedtime staple, and now you can upgrade your cup with the latest powerhouse powders! **Sixways Unwind + Recover Mushroom Blend** (£32, sixways.co) will help you drift off thanks to soothing and well-absorbed magnesium bisglycinate, calming L-tryptophan, stress-modulating nootropics reishi and ashwagandha, plus chamomile and lemon balm in a cacao base.

There is also **Welleco The Evening Elixir** (£35, welleco.co.uk), which is designed to help you wind down. Formulated with certified organic, fairly traded cocoa beans, the blend contains sleep-promoting magnesium, acerola cherry, chamomile flower extract, shiitake mushroom, lemon balm leaf, passionflower, lavender flower and pomegranate extract.

While aptly named **Youth&Earth Sleep Dust** (£24.99, youthandearth.com) is infused with ceremonial-grade Ecuadorian cacao and is designed to support sleep quality and nurture your nervous system thanks to key ingredients of valerian root extract and 5-HTP, magnesium threonate and stress-reducing honokiol and apigenin.

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13 Wake up gently

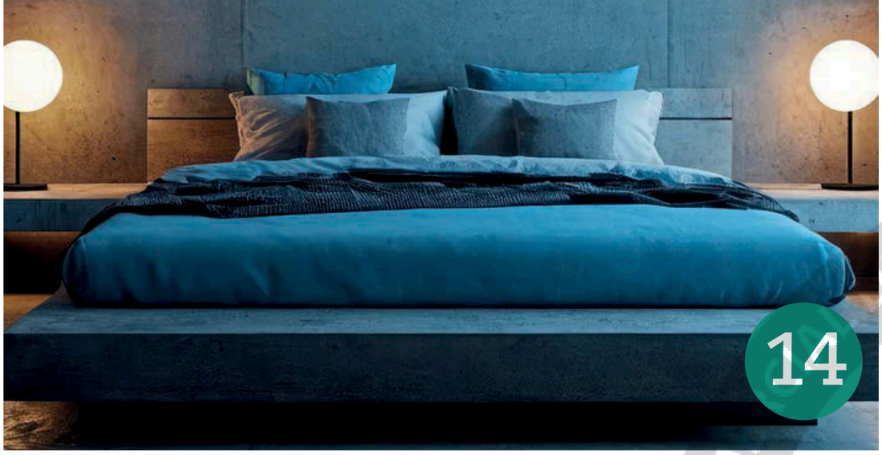
Wind down and wake up easily with **Lumie Bodyclock Glow 150** (£119, lumie.com) which has variable sunrise/sunset durations, 10 sleep/wake sounds, a light-sensitive auto-dimming display and more. All to support your body's natural sleep response, then wake you up gently, with a slowly brightening light so you feel alert for the day ahead.

9 hours… is how long it can take to break down caffeine, so avoid drinking it after midday.

Pay attention to your "sleep hygiene"

'You produce melatonin needed for sleep in the dark. So, keeping your room dark prevents disruption to your melatonin production. Keep your bedroom cool as you will sleep best in a cooler room. A temperature of 16-19°C is optimum. Sheets made from 100 per cent organic cotton are cooling and help you avoid chemicals often used in manufacturing,' says Bridget.

'Also, aim to go to bed and get up at the same time every day so your body gets used to a healthy sleeping routine. Turn off Wi-Fi to reduce electromagnetic field pollution, which can disrupt sleep. And avoid strenuous exercise in the evening which can disrupt your wind down. However, do get a dose of early morning sun to lift your mood and help restore your circadian rhythm for the day ahead.'



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YOUR EXPERTS



● **Charlie Morley has written four books on sleep and worked with military veterans and other highly traumatised people, helping them improve their sleep. For the past 15 years he's been running immersive sleep and dream retreats across the world and he's presented his work at both Oxford and Cambridge universities as well as the Ministry of Defence. Visit charliemorley.com for coherent breathing tracks and more information.**



● **Bridget Hancock is a naturopathic nutritionist and transformational life coach who blends science with traditional medicine to restore health in mind, body and spirit. Her book *Live Like a Lobster: How to extend life, avoid disease and confront cancer* (£23, Melbourne Books) is available in Waterstones, Amazon and independent book shops.**

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