- Sleep / Mind and body

PREVENTION

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SLEEP

While you're resting, your body is quietly recharging, recovering, and recalibrating so all your internal gears (your hormonal, muscular, and organ systems) will function as they should. Yet as simple as sleep may seem, for a lot of us it doesn't always do its job: It eludes us or doesn't deliver the rest we need. But you can get it to work for you again. **Here's what you need to know about your body's most crucial period of time.**



LEVI BROWN/TRUNK ARCHIVE.



YOUR BODY runs on sleep

BY MERYL DAVIDS LANDAU

WHEN YOU SNUGGLE INTO BED AND PULL UP THE COVERS, you may feel as if your work for the day is done. But like a cell phone getting a boost from its charger overnight, your body is just getting started on some very important repairs. "Sleep is crucial for overall health, as it is the foundation for both physiological and psychological processes," says Natalie Dautovich, Ph.D., environmental fellow at the National Sleep Foundation. "During sleep the body undergoes essential restoration and maintenance activities. It engages in vital reset and repair mechanisms, we are energized, and metabolic functions are optimized." Here, why sleep is so important for your mind and body.

It strengthens your brain

"Sleep is intricately linked to memory consolidation and cognitive function," says Dautovich. When you enter REM sleep (the stage in which brain activity picks up and your eyes move), your brain transfers

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short-term memories to long-term storage, she explains. It also removes unnecessary info, which helps with learning and memory and could be the reason you may wake up with the answer to a problem that was eating at you the previous day. This is also when your brain does crucial deep cleaning. Scientists have recently identified a pathway called the glymphatic system via which the body flushes out excess proteins, fluids, and other waste from the brain and the spinal cord during sleep—this includes proteins found in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease, which may help explain why sleep disorders such as insomnia and sleep apnea could raise the risk of it.

Your heart gets a rest

Sleeping fewer than six hours at night may put you at greater risk for a cardiovascular event than getting between six and eight hours of shut-eye, according to a large study across 21 countries. One potential reason: When you enter the deepest phases of sleep, your parasympathetic system takes over, controlling functions like breathing. This gives your heart a much-needed rest, and your blood pressure and heart rate drop. When you don't get that long, deep sleep, your cardiovascular system doesn't get a chance to wind down, and this can increase your risk of high blood pressure, a leading cause of heart disease and stroke. Sleep deprivation can also increase cholesterol levels and body-wide inflammation, leading to plaque formation in blood vessels, which makes the heart work even harder, says Michael Awad, M.D., chief of sleep surgery at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago.

It plays a role in weight management

First, the obvious: When you stay up late, you have extra hours to raid the fridge. But the sleep-weight connection goes deeper than that—when you don't get sufficient sleep, hunger hormones that help regulate appetite are disrupted, and lack of sleep can also affect the kinds of foods you put on your plate: "Brain regions are altered in such a way that you crave carbs and sugar," says Esra Tasali, M.D., director of the UChicago Sleep Center at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Your immune system is supported

You know how being sick makes you feel like sleeping all day? That's for good reason. Sleep is when your body ramps up production of cytokines, proteins that bolster immunity. "You're more likely to get a respiratory infection if you're not sleeping well," says Afifa Shamim-Uzzaman, M.D., of the University of Michigan's

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Sleep Disorders Center. Vaccines are also thought to work better with sleep: In a recent study, people who got less than six hours of sleep in the days surrounding vaccination had decreased antibody responses. Basically, your body can't mount its most powerful immune response when you're wiped out.

Your muscles are repaired

When you injure your shoulder or pull a hamstring, your body generates new cells and repairs old tissue to heal it—this involves acute inflammation (when cytokines tell immune cells to swoop in to aid in healing) and the release of growth hormone, and these functions rev up during sleep. Studies have demonstrated the important role of the circadian rhythm in setting off these healing processes, so any disruption of your sleep cycle may affect your body's ability to heal.

—additional reporting by Korin Miller

5 SIGNS THAT YOU'RE NOT GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP

If any of these sound familiar, you may need to spruce up your bedtime routine.

1 YOU FALL ASLEEP AT INCONVENIENT TIMES.

Sure, nodding off during a boring speech is normal, but when you can't keep your eyes open through dinner or while catching up on TV, you may have a sleep deficit.

2 YOU'RE GAINING WEIGHT.

If you see the number on the scale creeping up and can't figure out why, it may be due to sleepless nights, which can throw off the hormones that tell you when you're hungry and full.

3 YOU HAVE BRAIN FOG.

Can't remember where you put your glasses, or having trouble focusing at work? Your cognitive abilities can take a hit when you don't get enough shut-eye.

4 YOU GET UP TO USE THE BATHROOM—A LOT.

Sometimes it's not about an overactive bladder—if what is waking you during the night is a disorder such as sleep apnea, you may be going to the bathroom simply because you happen to be awake, not because you actually need to pee.

5 YOU'RE CRANKY.

Snapping at your kids or your partner for no good reason? Lack of sleep can make you frustrated, annoyed, and anxious.

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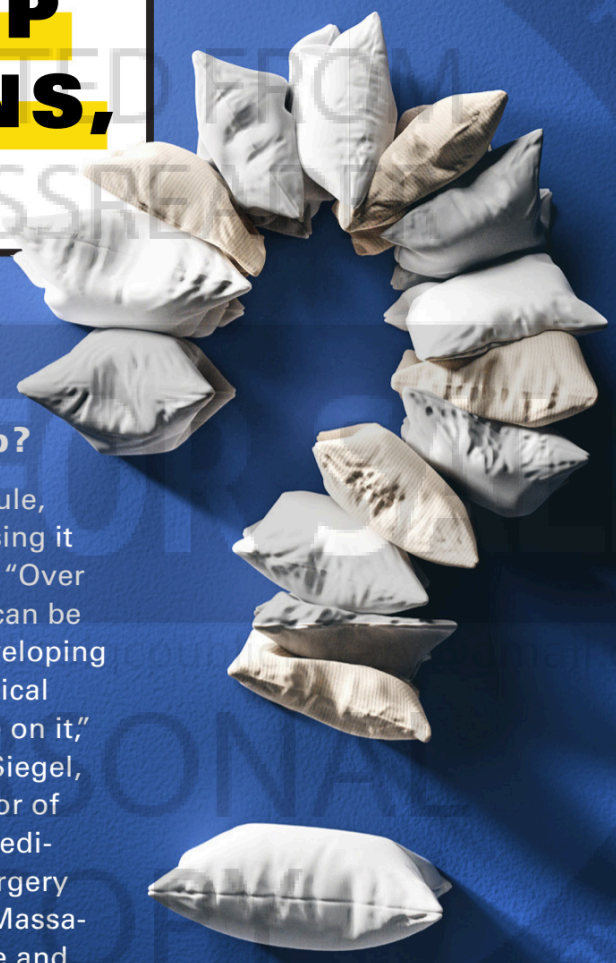
Your SLEEP QUESTIONS, answered



Can I take a SUPPLEMENT to help me fall asleep?

Let's talk about the two most common (and—spoiler alert—most useful) options: melatonin and magnesium. Melatonin is a hormone your brain makes in response to darkness, helping regulate your internal clock so you can fall asleep. But it's not meant to knock you out, explains Christopher Winter, M.D., of Charlottesville Neurology and Sleep Medicine, the author of *The Sleep Solution: Why Your Sleep Is Broken and How to Fix It*. Use it if you need to get yourself onto (or back onto) a sleep schedule, but avoid using it every night. "Over time, there can be a risk of developing a psychological dependence on it," says Noah Siegel, M.D., director of the Sleep Medicine and Surgery Division at Massachusetts Eye and Ear. Magnesium won't bring on zzz's tonight, but may help with sleep through relaxation and by reducing inflammation, both of which can improve overall sleep habits. Talk to your doctor before adding any type of supplement to your daily routine.

ANDRE RUCKER.

I'll admit it, I snore. It turns out IT'S NOT SLEEP APNEA, though, so what can I do about it?

First of all, good for you for getting it checked out. Sleep apnea is a serious condition that causes snoring, but not all snoring is because of sleep

apnea. Some people are simply more prone to snoring—you may be if you have a narrow airway, a low-lying soft palate, or a thick neck circumference. You can try sleeping on your side (on your back, gravity can cause your tongue to block your airway) or using a custom mouthpiece that moves your jawbone forward a bit to open up the airway. Speak to your sleep doctor about making one for you.

I'm supposed to WEAR A CPAP but it's uncomfortable, so I don't always use it. Any ideas?

For folks not familiar with it, a CPAP is a continuous positive airway pressure machine. It helps sleep apnea sufferers by providing, as the name suggests, a continuous stream of air, which prevents interrupted breathing during sleep. Your doctor probably told you to wear it every night, but for a lot of people the machine's hose and mask make it hard to find a comfortable sleeping position—kind of defeating the purpose. A great solution may be a CPAP pillow: These feature cutouts and contours to support back, side, and stomach sleepers who wear CPAP masks in bed. Many are made from memory foam or have removable inserts for custom support. Talk to your doctor before buying one to make sure they think it'll work with your machine.

Is it OK to HIT SNOOZE? I just can't get up without doing it.

There are two types of people in the world: those who leap out of bed when their alarm goes off and those who blindly hit the snooze button at least once…or thrice. Sleep specialists consistently advise against hitting snooze, saying it doesn't support good sleep hygiene, but two new studies in the *Journal of Sleep Research* are reawakening the debate. According to a study of 1,732 sleepers,

Do I really have to get up at the SAME TIME EVERY DAY?

Ah, you've heard the advice that keeping a consistent sleep schedule is the best thing you can do to fall asleep faster and wake up rested. No sleep expert will deny it, but you have some wiggle room, says Shanon Makekau, M.D., medical director at the Kaiser Permanente sleep lab in Hawaii. You have 30 to 60 minutes of leeway, to be exact—so if you typically get up at 6 a.m., sleeping until 7 on the weekends is just fine.

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morning drowsiness and shorter total sleep were more common among those who hit snooze, but they tended to be younger and have later bedtimes—so perhaps the problem isn't your snooze-button habit but your bedtime. In a second, smaller study, hitting snooze had no clear effect on things like mood, morning sleepiness, and overall sleep structure. Instead of asking if it's OK, ask yourself how you feel in the morning. If the answer isn't good, adjust your routine.



STOCKSY UNITED.

I have VIVID NIGHTMARES—I feel like a little kid, but they wake me up! What can I do about them?

Two common reasons adults have nightmares are stress and sleep deprivation, explains Alicia Roth, Ph.D., a clinical health psychologist specializing in behavioral sleep medicine at Cleveland Clinic. In addition to addressing those issues, consider a positive-imagery exercise before bed. Walk yourself through an imaginary nature scene that brings you peace and comfort. Focus on what you would see, hear, and smell if you were really there. "It's not always about getting rid of the bad stuff that appears in your nightmares; it's about adding in good, positive images for your brain to consume," says Roth. If your nightmares persist, see your doctor. You could have an underlying condition—anything from sleep apnea to PTSD—that could be manifesting as nightmares.

—reporting by Christie Calucchia, Madeleine Haase, and Alyssa Jung

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What's your CHRONOTYPE?

THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM? It's more like the lion does, according to the set of animal-centric "sleep personalities" coined by Michael J. Breus, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and a fellow of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. We each have a sleep chronotype that reflects our body's natural preference for when to fall asleep and wake up. These are tied to our circadian rhythm, our internal body clock that regulates cycles of alertness and sleepiness, but sleep chronotypes may also be associated with certain personality traits or habits. Figuring out where you fit into the animal sleep kingdom can help you tweak your routine for better snoozing.



LION

Wake up: 5 a.m.
Most productive: 8 a.m. to noon
Bedtime: 9 p.m.

People with the lion chronotype tend to wake up early, often around 5 a.m., and feel most energetic and productive before noon. Lions may feel most accomplished when they tackle their daily to-do lists as soon as possible, before their energy levels begin to fall in early afternoon. Lions typically wind down in the early evening.

Is This You?

TRY THIS: Meal-prepping dinner is a smart move. Since you'll likely hit the sack on the earlier side, making it easier for yourself to get a balanced meal on the table quickly means you'll have time to get in other good-for-you activities (like an evening walk or meditation session) before it's time for bed.



BEAR

Wake up: 7 a.m.
Most productive: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Bedtime: 10 p.m.

Roughly 55% of people are bears, making this the most common sleep chronotype. Like bears in the wild, people with this chronotype follow the sun, waking up when it rises in early morning and

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WOLF

Wake up: 9 a.m.
Most productive: 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Bedtime: Midnight

If you know someone who isn't a "morning person," chances are they're a wolf—about 15% of people have this chronotype. Wolves usually wake up later in the day and tend to get bursts of energy in the evening.

Is This You?

TRY THIS: Knowing what winds you down at night can help prevent your bedtime from getting extended even later so you won't skimp on zzz's. If you can't seem to find the magic sleep switch, try sipping decaffeinated tea made from something like chamomile, lemongrass, rose, or valerian root—all these contain plant compounds that may produce feelings of calmness to support a healthy sleep cycle.



DOLPHIN

Wake up: 6 a.m.
Most productive: 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Bedtime: 11 p.m.

Dolphins are able to remain alert while sleeping so as to evade predators, and people with this sleep chronotype often complain of insomnia, tend to be prone to fragmented sleep patterns, and are sensitive to light and noise while they sleep.

Is This You?

TRY THIS: Take a look at your sleep routine and see where you can make small improvements. Maybe you need to focus on going to sleep and waking up at more consistent times all week. Perhaps you'd benefit from white noise to help drown out sounds that disrupt your slumber at night. And if any sliver of light rouses you, try hanging blackout curtains and wearing a silk sleep mask, and cover electronics that give off a glow.

retiring as darkness falls in the early evening, making nighttime social activities a challenge.

Is This You?

TRY THIS: Fuel up with a brainpower breakfast that will get you through your most productive chunk of the day—it should include quality carbs (such as oats or whole-grain toast), protein (say, eggs or yogurt), and a healthy fat source (e.g., avocado or nuts), and minimize sugar to prevent a crash.

For more information on sleep chronotypes and how to thrive with yours, visit Breus's website at **thesleepdoctor.com**.

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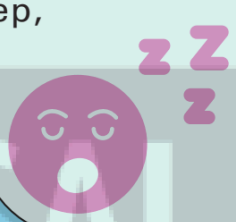
Sleep SOLUTIONS

BY LISA BAIN

Tossing, turning, and pacing rather than snoozing? If your buzzy brain is keeping you from falling asleep or staying asleep, **WE'VE GOT SOME ADVICE.**



HAVING TROUBLE DOZING OFF AT NIGHT?

FIRST, SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS.

Follow these basic rules from the National Sleep Foundation: Make sure your room is cool (between 60°F to 67°F is best) and dark (blackout curtains or blinds help), and charge your phone far away from your bed. In fact, it's smart to avoid screens for an hour before bedtime.

EXTRA SLEEP SUPPORT

Try writing down a list before lights-out. Choose a "Things I'm Worried About" list, a to-do list for the next day, or a gratitude list—whichever will help you let go.

BREATHE TO CALM YOUR MIND.

Deep breathing is known to calm the nervous system and promote relaxation, says Lindsey Benoit O'Connell, founder of The LAB Wellness and a certified meditation teacher, breath work facilitator, and sound healer. She suggests the 4-7-8 technique: Lie in bed, close your eyes, and place your tongue on the roof of your mouth behind your teeth. Inhale softly through your nostrils for four counts, hold your breath for seven counts, and exhale through your mouth for eight counts (making a gentle whooshing sound). Repeat the cycle three more times.



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HAVING TROUBLE FALLING BACK TO SLEEP DURING THE WEE HOURS?

FIND PEACE OF MIND WITH MEDITATION.

Tap into mindfulness to help quiet brain chatter, says O'Connell. "Visualize a restful place—it could be a serene beach, your childhood bedroom, or anywhere you feel happy and relaxed," she says. "This is calming and can help distract you from ruminating."



EXTRA SLEEP SUPPORT

Enhance your meditation by adding more details about your imaginary safe space. Think about what you would see around you or how it would sound or smell, says O'Connell. Make it as vivid as you can and let the peacefulness soothe you as you head to slumberland.

GIVE UP—for a while.

Still can't drift off? If you've been trying for 15 minutes or so, relocate to a different comfy spot, suggests the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Do something that won't engage your brain, like sketching or reading a boring book. Keep the lights dim, and when your eyelids start getting heavy again, slip back under the covers.

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SLEEP TRACKING 101

BY RAJ DASGUPTA, M.D.

TO SLEEP TRACK OR NOT TO SLEEP TRACK?

That is the question for many sleepers who are interested in knowing what happens while they're conked out. But what exactly is your device or app tracking, and what do you do with its insights once you have them?

In simple terms, sleep tracking actively monitors sleep patterns and sleep quality throughout the night. There are countless sleep-tracking devices, and their capabilities can differ slightly, but most log things such as duration of sleep, time spent in bed, how long you're in various sleep stages, sleep quality, and other factors such as movement, snoring, and nighttime awakenings.

What's still up in the air is how accurate sleep trackers are. They're not so precise when it comes to pinpointing time spent in specific sleep stages (such as REM, the stage in which you dream), but they're generally good at estimating total sleep duration and assessing patterns such as how often you awaken during the night.

Tracking sleep patterns can be useful in helping you figure out where you need

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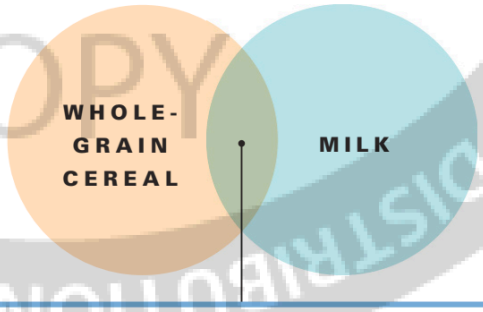
Best BEDTIME BITES

BY ALYSSA JUNG



EVER SAY GOOD NIGHT AND THEN HAVE YOUR STOMACH enter the conversation with a loud grumbling that means "Feed me!"? Contrary to what you might have heard about pre-bed snacking messing with sleep, the right bedtime snack can actually help summon zzz's—or at least satisfy your peckishness so you can nod off, says Jaclyn London, M.S., R.D., a New York City–based registered dietitian and podcast host and the author of *Dressing on the Side (and Other Diet Myths Debunked)*. **Here, snooze-promoting combos to try, along with how to create your own bedtime bite.**



Try having breakfast before bed. The carbohydrates in whole-grain cereal help you fall asleep, and protein-rich milk helps you stay asleep, says London. "Milk is chock-full of calcium and magnesium, which help you produce melatonin, the hormone responsible for sleep regulation," London adds. Choose a low-sugar cereal with 4 g or less of the sweet stuff, and opt for low-fat or nonfat milk.

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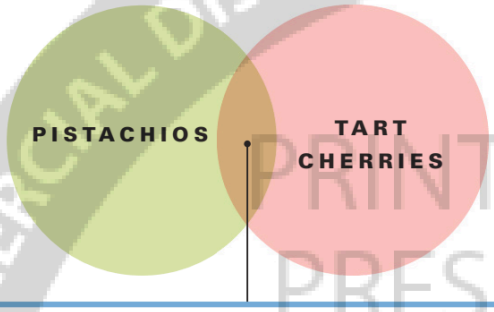
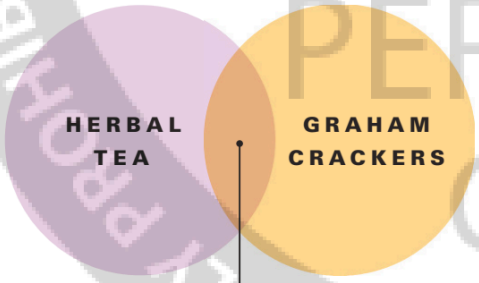


This conk-out combo is light enough to prevent you from getting too full or bloated to nod off. "Pistachios have sleep-inducing protein, vitamin B_6, and magnesium, and unsweetened tart cherries contain melatonin—all can help you get some sleep," says London. Aim to have a small handful (about ¼ cup) so you won't go to bed feeling stuffed.

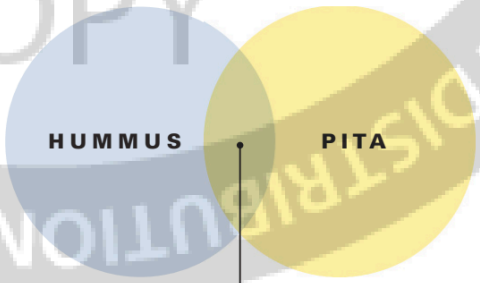
BUILD THE PERFECT SLEEPYTIME SNACK

Keep these tips in mind when deciding what to nosh on:

- **Strive for a combo of carbs and protein** to promote satiety and support production of serotonin, a precursor for sleep-promoting melatonin.
- **Choose options that are lower in fat.** "Lying down after a high-fat meal or snack can disrupt the digestion process, which may lead to GI symptoms like acid reflux and nausea," says London.
- **Consider hydrating foods.** "Fruits and veggies provide some extra H_2O along with key minerals that support the production of neurotransmitters involved with sleep, muscle and nerve function, and blood pressure regulation," London says.



"Try chamomile or another herbal blend that soothes you; this primes you for sleep by helping you feel cozy and hydrated. Then grab something to munch on, like a couple of sheets of whole-grain graham crackers to get other vitamins and minerals that will help you power down," says London.



Dip your way to dreamland. A small portion of hummus paired with a few triangles of 100% whole-grain pita or pita chips and a couple of veggie sticks delivers a light mix of protein and carbs to satisfy your appetite and support sleep, London says.

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Sleep and YOUR MOOD

BY STEPHANIE DOLGOFF

FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION SURVEY resoundingly confirm what clinical studies (and the too-frequent experience of snapping at a child for behaving like a child!) have been pointing to for decades: When you don't get enough quality sleep, you feel like trash.

Among the findings: Adults who slept less than seven hours per weekday night were three times as likely to have moderate to severe depressive symptoms as those who slept seven to nine hours. And 65% of people who were dissatisfied with their sleep had mild or greater levels of depressive symptoms, with 31% in the moderate-to-severe

TRAVIS RATHBONE/TRUNK ARCHIVE.

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range. Even getting just two nights of rough sleep was associated with greater levels of depressive symptoms. Meanwhile, more than 90% of those who were happy with their sleep and who engaged in healthy sleep behaviors reported no depression or minimal levels of it.

These stats are drawn from the general population, not folks who were selected for study because they had already been diagnosed with insomnia or clinical depression. "The majority of what we know comes from clinical research—here we're talking about your neighbor, your son or daughter, your mailman," says Joseph M. Dzierzewski, Ph.D., vice president of research and scientific affairs at the National Sleep Foundation.

Your brain needs to snooze

Lack of sleep affects your ability to regulate your emotions, making handling daily stresses even harder (and being super stressed in general can keep you up at night, continuing the miserable cycle). Exactly why isn't clear, but part of the reason is that sleep lets the brain regroup. "Healthy sleep repairs adaptive processing, functional brain activity, [and] integrity of the media prefrontal cortex-amygdala connections, and thus improves the capacity to regulate emotions as well as an individual's well-being," concluded one literature review in the journal *AIMS Neuroscience*.

45%

WHO HAD TROUBLE FALLING ASLEEP NIGHTLY REPORTED MODERATE TO SEVERE LEVELS OF DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS.

55%

who scored low on MEASURES OF QUALITY SLEEP reported mild or greater levels of depressive symptoms.

Of course, trouble sleeping is both a cause and a symptom of depression, which means it can be hard to untangle the real issue and help someone feel better. What's more, when someone improves their sleep it's more likely to wind up improving their mood than treating depression and hoping they start to sleep better, says Dzierzewski. "Poor sleep is likely to be one of the remaining symptoms after your mood is improved," he adds.

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Sleep better to feel better

So what's a person whose depression is keeping them up to do? Whether it feels that way or not, you do have the power to improve your sleep, and it starts with simple tweaks to daily habits. If you are somewhat depressed (or are irritable or anxious, or are experiencing other mood issues tied to depression) but you're still functional, Dzierzewski recommends making sure you do what he calls "the basics:" Spend time in bright light (ideally in the morning), exercise, and eat meals at consistent times. "Everyone can do these, and it can make a big difference to nighttime sleep," Dzierzewski says, adding that these habits may also help alleviate depression. If you're quite depressed and the basics are hard, or if your relationships and work/life balance are suffering, see your doctor to address your mental health directly.

And if you're simply not getting enough sleep because you are having too much fun or you can't stop binge-watching a favorite show, know that not prioritizing sleep can lead to mood issues that haven't been a problem before. Some signs that you're slipping into depression include being overly irritable, experiencing relationship strain, and not finding joy in things you typically like. "These are indications that your mood is suffering, and it could be related to your sleep," Dzierzewski says. No matter what, "when you sleep poorly it shades the lens through which you view the world. It all comes down to how you feel when you're awake, so a good place to start is with how you are feeling," he adds.

38%

WITH **DIFFICULTY STAYING ASLEEP TWO NIGHTS A WEEK** REPORTED MILD OR GREATER DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS.

ONLY 9%

who **PRACTICED HEALTHY SLEEP BEHAVIORS** reported depressive symptoms.

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