The Truth About “Sleep Meds”

Melatonin – this hormone is produced by your body to regulate your natural sleep-wake cycles, but when taken as a supplement can help with jet lag or adjusting sleep times for shift workers.

Antihistamines (Benadryl, Nyquil, Zzzquil, Aleve PM) – these cause a sedating effect that can help some people fall asleep more easily, but you can develop tolerance quickly, so they are not intended for long-term use.

Prescription Hypnotics & Benzodiazepines (Zolpidem, Ambien, Xanax) – these controlled substances can be prescribed by your doctor for short periods of time to help with severe insomnia, but they also should not be taken long-term due to their various side effects and the risk of dependency.

Depressants (alcohol) – While some say alcohol helps them fall asleep, it actually reduces the quality of sleep, causing you to wake up in the morning feeling less rested.

Marijuana – Some people report that they sleep better after smoking marijuana, but there is little research to support this.

Sleep Restriction Therapy

This behavioral treatment can be helpful to people who find themselves lying in bed unable to fall asleep. It works by increasing sleep efficiency and reducing the variability in sleep. Use a sleep log for 2 weeks to monitor how much time you spend in bed and how much of that time is actually spent asleep. Add up the amount of time spent asleep over the course of 2 weeks and divide by 14. This is the average amount of sleep you get at night.

Determine time in bed – Once you’ve determined your average amount of sleep per night, add 30 minutes; this will be the amount of time you allow yourself to be in bed at night.

Set a wake time – Choose a time when you want to wake up, set an alarm, and wake up at this same time every morning, even weekends.

Set a bed time – Take your wake time and count back the amount of time you will allow yourself to be in bed. Make sure you get in bed ready to sleep at this time (no earlier!)

Stick to this schedule for 2 weeks – Over the course of 2 weeks you will begin to associate your bed with sleeping and you will fall asleep faster upon getting into bed.

Add time – After 2 weeks, set your bed time earlier by 15 minutes and maintain this new bed time for 1 week, repeating until you begin to wake up feeling fully rested every morning.
What’s Normal?

Sleep recommendations change as one gets older, but it is typically recommended that any adult between 18-64 years old gets 7-9 hours per night, while those 65 and older should get 7-8 hours. Some people may require more than this amount, and others might feel fine with less, but you should be getting enough sleep so that you wake up every morning feeling refreshed and ready to start your day. Sleep insufficiency is extremely common, with over 1/3 of Americans not getting the recommended nightly amount!

Sleep Recommendations by Age

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<th>18-25 years</th>
<th>26-64 years</th>
<th>65+ years</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>7-9 hours</td>
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Things to Avoid Before Bed:
- Alcohol
- Heavy Meals
- Caffeine
- Cigarettes

How to Improve your Sleep:
- Establish a nightly routine: dim the lights, reduce noise, relax, take care of personal hygiene
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends!
- Avoid naps late in the day
- Decrease blue light exposure for 2 hours before you go to bed (TVs, computers, phones, etc.)
- Only use the bed for sleep and sex; no reading or watching TV in bed as these stimulate the mind and can keep you awake
- If having trouble falling asleep, don’t look at the clock
- Try Sleep Restriction (see back)

Insufficient Sleep is Associated with ↑ Risk of:
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Immunosuppression
- Obesity
- Depression
- Car Crashes
- Decreased productivity
- All-Cause Mortality