

# 7 Ideas to Help Change Your Ways

## Little habit alterations can make a big difference when bedtime comes.

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### Nap and Exercise

**You might be surprised to find out just how significant these simple suggestions prove to be. Give them a chance to improve your sleep -- and your life.**

**1. Join the Pod People.** Want to get some sleep and boost job performance by 34 percent?" Take a 26-minute nap," says Sara Mednick, Ph.D., research scientist at the University of California at San Diego and author of *Take a Nap! Change Your Life*. Studies show that one nap of up to 90 minutes between the hours of 1:00 and 4:00 P.M. will reduce your sleep debt, invigorate your day, boost your job performance, and not affect night sleep, says Dr. Mednick. "To start, lie down at the same time every day for 20 minutes without the expectation of falling asleep," she says. "That way, you're teaching your body that it's okay to relax in the middle of the day." Eventually your body will believe you, and you'll doze off. Set your watch or cell phone to wake you up -- and feel free to expand the time to sleep. Finding a place to sleep can be tricky. Your car is one place, outside under a tree in a crime-free park is another. Or if you're in a large city, check out the sleep pods some businesses rent out specifically for naps. But what about your job? "If you can take a 20-minute break to run to Starbucks for coffee," says Dr. Mednick, "you can find 20 minutes for a nap." "If your employer is dubious about the idea, send them to Dr. Mednick. She'll show him or her the NASA studies demonstrating that napping gives us a mental edge.

**2. Work It.** "Exercise improves sleep as effectively as benzodiazepines in some studies," reports Kalyanakrishnan Ramakrishnan, M.D., an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. On average it reduces the time it takes to get to sleep by 12 minutes, and it increases total sleep time by 42 minutes. And it doesn't take much. Studies at the University of Arizona show that walking six blocks at a normal pace during the day significantly improves sleep at night for women. Scientists suspect that exercise sets your biological clock into a consistent wake/sleep pattern, or it may boost the brain's production of serotonin, a neurochemical that encourages sleep. Just make sure you finish your walk at least two hours before bed. Any later and the energizing effect of the activity can actually keep you up.

### Rest Your Mind

**3. Keep a Worry Book.** "Put a 'worry book' beside your bed," suggests UCLA's Dr. Yan-Go. When you wake and start worrying, jot down everything you're worrying about and any strategies you've thought of that will solve the problems to which they're related. Then close the book, put it on your nightstand, turn out the

light, and go back to sleep. Your worries will be waiting for you in the morning.

**4. Forget Anderson.** Given the fact that most late-night newscasts tend to feature murder, mayhem, and man's inhumanity to man, these are bound to turn on every arousal mechanism your body owns. No way are you going to drift into a peaceful sleep after 30 to 60 minutes of watching violence and disturbing stories. So ditch the late news. Watch it in the morning when that shot of adrenalin it triggers will help you fight rush-hour traffic.

**5. Forget Stephen.** Stephen King thrillers and every other scary book are absolutely verboten if you expect to sleep, says Becky Wang-Cheng, M.D., a medical director at Kettering Medical Center in Ohio. No one sleeps when they're expecting something from under the bed to grab them. Kids aren't the only ones afraid of monsters.

**6. Forget Howard.** Like to catch the foul ball's late-night reruns on satellite radio? Keep the Shock Jock on morning-drive time. For some people it's hard to sleep after that much -- um -- "stimulation."

**7. Have Sex Instead.** Enjoy a quickie, suggests Dr. Wang-Cheng. Some 44 percent of midlife women say they don't have time for sex. But the Big O is still one of the most sleep-inducing agents around. Just don't forget to protect yourself against an unanticipated side effect that could appear nine months later. Now that would really trash your sleep!