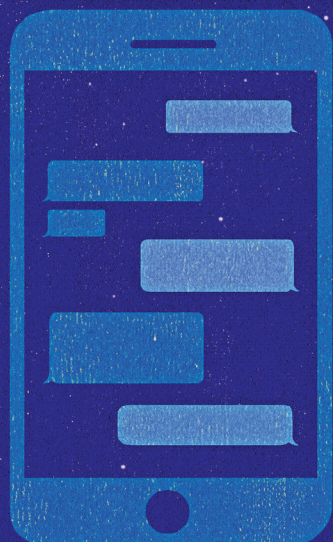


FEELING **good**



We may spend a third of our life snoozing, but we probably devote another quarter to worrying that that's not enough. Here's how to optimize your zzz's.

BY Abigail Libers



WHETHER YOU'RE 26 or 62, there's always something (or, ahem, someone) that threatens a night of restful slumber. But that doesn't mean you're doomed to eternal exhaustion (or diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease—all conditions for which chronic sleep deficits can raise the risk). We've rounded up the most common sleep sappers throughout a woman's life—plus expert tips for coping. Read 'em and sleep.

EARLY 20s TO MID-30s

SLEEP THIEF: An erratic schedule

This is the decade of working late and partying later. Sleeping in on weekends to catch up can result in "social jet lag," a pattern shift linked to moodiness, increased fatigue, and poor health. According to a University of Arizona study of nearly 1,000 people ages 22 to 60, each hour of social jet lag may be associated with an 11 percent greater chance of having heart disease.

Snooze control: Strive for consistency.

"The more set your bedtime and wake-up time, the better the quality of your sleep," says Rachel Salas, MD, associate professor of neurology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. One way to maintain a schedule: Treat zzz's like steps and track them with a smartwatch (like the Fitbit Versa; fitbit.com).

SLEEP THIEF: Your period

Many women report sleeplessness during days 21 to 28 of their cycle and in the few nights following their period, says Natalie Dautovich, PhD, assistant professor of counseling psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University, who studies factors that affect sleep. During this time, she explains, your core body temperature increases, potentially interrupting slumber. Other sleep saboteurs include cramping, bloating, and muscle aches, all common PMS symptoms.

Snooze control: Take a shower or bath before bed.

"The contrast between the warm water and the cool air may make you feel sleepy and may also help with cramps," Dautovich says.

SLEEP THIEF: Alcohol

Excessive drinking is most common among people ages 18 to 34. But while alcohol is a depressant that can make you feel relaxed or even drowsy, once your body metabolizes

38
percent
of women
ages
40 to 55
reported
difficulty
sleeping.

—The Study
of Women's
Health Across
the Nation

it, you may find yourself wide awake in the middle of the night, says Salas.

Snooze control: Sip strategically.

"If you're going to drink, stick to one and enjoy it as soon as you get home from work or with dinner, so you have time to process the alcohol," says Chris Winter, MD, a sleep specialist in Charlottesville, Virginia. Then try unwinding with some gentle yoga poses.

SLEEP THIEF: Technology

The more time you're online, the less you're spending in dreamland. Plus, light—including blue light from screens—can mess with your body's circadian rhythms. "Blue light sends messages to your brain that it's time to be awake," Salas says. In fact, researchers have found that blue light suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone whose levels rise at night to help you sleep.

Snooze control: Unplug.

Try to avoid screens at least an hour before going to bed. If you must tap, type, or scroll just before turning in, dim the glow and skip over stories and images that could potentially rile you up.

SLEEP THIEF: Pregnancy

"Changing hormone levels can cause daytime sleepiness, as well as swelling in the nasal passages and throat, which can lead to breathing problems that contribute to

snoring and sleep apnea," says Dautovich. You may be bothered by pregnancy-related nighttime reflux or leg cramps as well, notes Christine Won, MD, medical director of the Yale Centers for Sleep Medicine.

Snooze control: Support yourself.

"Sleeping on your side with pillows between your knees, behind your back, and under your abdomen can alleviate discomfort," Dautovich says. If you're dealing with reflux or nasal congestion, try propping yourself up. To help prevent or ease leg cramps, take a warm bath or use a hot compress before bed, suggests Won.

SLEEP THIEF: Narcolepsy

This chronic sleep disorder, which affects as many as 200,000 Americans and is characterized by overwhelming daytime drowsiness and uncontrollable napping, can start in early adulthood. "People with the condition aren't making enough of a chemical called orexin that helps us feel awake," explains Winter.

Snooze control: See a doctor.

Because many narcolepsy symptoms are often mistaken for those of other conditions such as depression or insomnia, patients can suffer from the disorder for ten to 15 years before being diagnosed. A doctor may prescribe a stimulant to help keep you alert during the day.



MID-30s TO MID-40s

SLEEP THIEF: Restless legs syndrome

The often-overlooked medical issue, affecting approximately 5 to 10 percent of adults, can pop up in this decade, says Winter, author of *The Sleep Solution*. During the day you're exhausted, and at night you feel a crawling, throbbing, aching, or itching sensation in your legs that compels you to kick and wiggle—sometimes right out of bed.

Snooze control: A weighted blanket.

"The heaviness seems to be comforting to some of my patients, particularly if they have issues with stress or anxiety," says Salas. A doctor can also prescribe medication that increases movement-controlling dopamine in the brain, which should help with physical symptoms, Winter says.

SLEEP THIEF: Stress

On a stress scale of 1 to 10, Gen-Xers report an average level of 5.1—higher than boomers (4.1) and older adults (3.3), according to the latest Stress in America survey from the American Psychological Association. "Stressors trigger our mind and body to scan for threats at night, which is not compatible with restful sleep," Dautovich says.

Snooze control: Work out during the day; wind down at night.

Exercise can help you nod off faster and sleep more soundly, research indicates. Though the exact reason is unclear, it may be because physical activity reduces stress and increases the amount of slow-wave (a.k.a. deep) sleep. Right before bed, try a ten-minute meditation, which may help insomnia. (Not a natural meditator? Download an app like Headspace or Calm.)

MID-40s TO MID-50s

SLEEP THIEF: Perimenopause and menopause

"Hot flashes occur in 60 to 80 percent of women, and when they're at night, they frequently wake women up," says Sara Nowakowski, PhD, a behavioral sleep medicine specialist and assistant professor at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Even without nocturnal hot flashes, the decline in estrogen and progesterone—both of which contribute to better rest, fewer awakenings, and the ability to drift off—can work against you.

Solution: Keep your cool.

Set your bedroom temp between 60 and 68 degrees, suggests Dautovich. "Moisture-wicking sheets and clothing can also help you cool down," she says. Your gynecologist or primary care provider may prescribe

hormone replacement therapy, which can offer relief from hot flashes.

SLEEP THIEF: Light

The amount of sleep we need doesn't change with age, but as we get older, Winter says, we tend to be more easily awakened, and one of the most common disturbances is luminescence—from the dawn's early light or your alarm clock, AC, or TV.

Snooze control: Go dark at night.

Block the glow of machines. And if you've somehow made it this long without blackout curtains or shades, it may be time to invest. You can create your own sunrise with a light-therapy alarm clock that gradually brightens.

SLEEP THIEF: Your partner

Yes, you love them, but must they snore, squirm, sleepwalk, and secretly turn up the heat?

Snooze control: Collaborate and compromise.

Talk to nasal noisemakers about consulting a doctor, which will benefit you both if sleep apnea is involved. Do some like it hot, or at least hotter than others? Consider separate blankets: one cozy flannel, one with sweat-wicking fabric. A small fan can also be directed at one side of the bed.

SLEEP THIEF: Mood disorders

Fluctuating hormones are likely part of why perimenopausal and early-postmenopausal women are at increased risk for depression and anxiety, both of which can affect sleep.

Snooze control: Seek treatment.

"If you're dealing with a transient stressor—like a death in the family or a job layoff—then I might prescribe sleeping pills," says Salas. "But in general, I don't recommend them." The reason: They're not as beneficial for long-term sleep issues as a nonpharmacological treatment like cognitive-behavioral therapy. Plus, people can build up a tolerance to pills, some of which may also bring unpleasant side effects such as waking in the night and doing things—like eating or emailing—that you don't remember the next day. And while pills may help you sleep, you might feel drowsy the next day. If you're dealing with chronic insomnia, see a behavioral sleep psychologist (behavioralsleep.org), who can help shed light on your nocturnal angst.

MID-50s AND BEYOND

SLEEP THIEF: Sleep apnea

One study found that 47 percent of female subjects over the age of 55 had sleep apnea. Once again, hormones play a role: Estrogen

and progesterone help keep airways open by maintaining muscle tone in the throat; as their levels decrease, the odds of obstructed breathing rise. Hormonal changes can also lead to increased body fat, including in the tissues surrounding the upper airway, which may further disrupt breathing.

Snooze control: Treat it seriously.

If you suspect you snore, grind your teeth, often wake up with a dry mouth, and are inexplicably sleepy during the day, make an appointment with a behavioral sleep medicine specialist or your GP. She can give you a take-home breathing monitor to wear at night to determine whether you have sleep apnea; if you do, she may prescribe a CPAP device (a mask that blows air into your nose or both nose and mouth to help you breathe).

SLEEP THIEF: Medications

"Blood pressure meds that work as diuretics can cause people to wake at night to urinate," says Winter. Other potential anti-sleep pills: some antihypertensive medications, antidepressants, and thyroid meds.

Snooze control: Talk to your doctor.

If you've given yourself time to adjust to a drug—which could take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks—and you're still experiencing sleep-disrupting side effects, talk to your prescriber, who may adjust your dosage or put you on alternative meds.

SLEEP THIEF: Aches and pains

Chronic discomfort can disrupt your shut-eye at any age, but as the years go by, you're more likely to deal with rotator cuff issues and joint and back pain, says Winter.

Solution: Refeather your nest.

If you've had your mattress for more than ten years, it may not be giving your body the support it needs. Time for a new one—and maybe a fresh pillow and some soft, high-end sheets as well. You've earned it.

