

A Shower at Night Might Help You Sleep Better

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Temperature has an effect on your health and immune system and regulates your sleep
- › Taking a warm shower or bath at least 90 minutes before bed may positively impact your sleep quality, reduce stress and help you feel well rested in the morning
- › Stress takes a toll on your health, which quality sleep may help to repair; strategies such as wearing amber glasses at night, lowering the temperature in your bedroom and sleeping naked may improve your sleep quality

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Environmental temperature has more than one influence on how your body functions. For example, did you know that exposure to extreme temperatures can be a catalyst to improve your health?

As you may have read in previous articles, mitochondria are the energy generators in your cells. When they don't work properly, your body's ability to produce energy is impaired. This may affect not only your metabolism but also your immune system and how diseases are triggered and grow.

The key to getting older mitochondria out and creating new ones is called mitochondrial biogenesis. This process is triggered through exposure to extreme temperatures, exercise and intermittent fasting, for example.

Your sleep is also dependent on appropriate temperature regulation. As you sleep, your body's natural internal temperature drops to the lowest level, usually about four hours after falling asleep. You may take advantage of this function, improve your quality of sleep and your ability to fall asleep, by making a few adjustments in the evening.

Temperature Drop Helps Trigger Sleepiness

Temperature is usually overlooked when you are trying to fall asleep faster or enjoy a better night of sleep. The temperature of your body and of your room are both variables that have an impact on whether you sleep peacefully or wake tired the next day.

Normally, you'll start to feel tired and sleepy as your body temperature starts to decline.¹ If you struggle to fall asleep, it may be that your core body temperature is warmer to start. The inability to cool or heat core body temperature efficiently may be one explanation for difficulty falling asleep.^{2,3}

This information supports research suggesting sleeping at a room temperature between 60 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit improves sleep quality.⁴

However, while a cool room is best for quality sleep through the night, a relaxing warm shower at least 90 minutes before bed may actually improve the amount of deep sleep you achieve, helping you to feel more rested when you wake in the morning.

Multiple studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of this in both young and elderly subjects.^{5,6,7,8,9} Slow wave sleep is the deepest stage of non-rapid eye movement sleep you achieve.¹⁰

Researchers are not clear if it is the actual temperature that is critical, or the rate at which temperature drops following the onset of sleep.¹¹

What is known is that late afternoon or early evening passive heating through a warm shower or relaxing bath increases your body temperature. Your body temperature then returns to near normal, but at bedtime it is still slightly higher than if you didn't take a shower.

This difference continues in the early hours of the night and is positively related to the amount of deep sleep you achieve. Alternatively, if taking a shower or warm bath doesn't fit your schedule, a warm foot bath may achieve similar results, helping you to fall asleep faster and enjoy a restful night of sleep.^{12,13}

More Benefits to Evening Showers

You may have trouble falling asleep if you do not head to bed as soon as your body temperature begins to drop.

Researchers advise an evening shower may prolong this temperature reduction enough that you have “fluffed the psychological pillow.”¹⁴ The trick is not to start too late in the day. Dr. Dianne Augelli, a sleep disorder specialist at NY-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, said:¹⁵

“You don't want to heat yourself up right before bed. Cooling down is a signal that tells us we're supposed to go to sleep.”

Thus, interrupting this process may make falling asleep more difficult. Include washing your face in this routine to help remove dirt or makeup. This may help reduce breakouts, help your face absorb moisturizer more effectively, prevent eye infections from makeup and reduce signs of aging.¹⁶

Showering and cleansing your face also keep your sheets clean, which may affect allergies. One-third of your life is spent between sheets that gather sweat and dead skin cells.

Showering each night helps keep your sheets cleaner.¹⁷ Dust mites are attracted to skin cells, which produce droppings that contain allergens associated with allergic reactions. Mary Zeitler, a laundry expert at Whirlpool's Institute of Home Science, recommends washing sheets once a week to keep dust mites at bay.¹⁸

Showering in the evening may even make for an easier morning routine. Although you may find a shower wakes you up, a cold splash of water on your face and a cup of tea

may achieve the same results.

The bonus is an extra 20 minutes in the morning you may decide to use to stretch, watch the sunrise or even sleep a few extra minutes. Evening showers also help you to relax and slow down at the end of the day, reducing anxiety and relaxing your muscles.¹⁹

Slow Down at the End of the Day

There are distinct benefits to slowing down and relaxing at the end of the day, not the least of which is that it makes **falling asleep easier**.

Stress is a significant challenge, often triggering health conditions such as heart disease, stroke and immune mediated illnesses. By incorporating a few relaxation techniques, you may reduce the effects of stress and get a better night of sleep.

You will still need to meet deadlines at work or handle a stressful personal crisis, but slowing down at the end of the day will help to reduce the amount of cortisol your adrenal glands are pumping out during the day and help your body to repair some of the damage done by a chronic amount of stress.

Researchers have found that around 75% of all doctor's visits are related to health conditions triggered by chronic stress.²⁰ The cost of stress-related diseases and productivity costs American industries over \$300 billion annually.

Scientists have long known that psychological stress is also an important factor in illnesses that aren't immediately life threatening, such as the common cold,^{21,22} Type 2 diabetes, heartburn, nausea and diarrhea, to name just a few.²³

Gastrointestinal disorders, challenges to your immune response and disruption to your neuroendocrine systems are all affected by stress.

When you relax, you'll also experience an improvement in your mood, your memory, creativity and your ability to concentrate.²⁴ Relaxation at the end of a busy day enables

you to make a more accurate assessment of your day, celebrate your successes and rejuvenate and prepare for the next day.²⁵

Quality Sleep Improves Your Health

Quality sleep is actually essential for cementing events into long-term memory, and for making sense of your life. Essentially, during sleep, your brain pulls together and extracts meaning while discarding unimportant details. In fact, sleep increases your ability to gain insights that would otherwise remain elusive.

Personal growth isn't the only benefit to quality sleep. Lack of sleep may increase your risk of heart disease and stroke, weight gain, Type 2 diabetes and even Alzheimer's disease. Sleep is one of the foundational pillars to your health and wellness. To gain greater insight into how sleep is integral to your health, I would encourage you to read my previous articles:

- [The Truth About Sleep](#)
- [Sleep Problems? Gardening May Help](#)
- [Sleep Promotes Brain Health](#)
- [Lack of Sleep Can Cancel the Benefits of Exercise](#)

More Ways to Relax Before Bed

Taking a relaxing bath or shower, or soaking your feet, aren't the only ways to enjoy the benefits of relaxing and destressing before bed. Deep breathing and relaxing [yoga](#) poses can also help you to calm down, destress and relax.²⁶

Your body has a physiological response to stress by tightening and constricting muscles. Simple, basic stretching exercises are also beneficial to reduce muscle tension that may lead to an imbalance in how you use your body, and later result in muscle injury.

It's important to unplug from the factors in your day that cause you stress, such as your email, work or stressful personal relationships. Some people enjoy picking up a hobby in the evenings, such as painting, journaling, cooking or taking long walks in nature.²⁷

When you're taking a bath, you may want to turn down the lights or read a good book while you're relaxing in the tub. You may find that writing down the items you want to remember for the next day at work helps you to put them out of your mind and relax at home, instead of continuing to run through what you'll be doing the next day.

The technique I strongly recommend you incorporate into your evening routine – and which you may also find useful throughout the day – is [Emotional Freedom Techniques \(EFT\)](#). This technique can be very effective for reducing stress and inducing relaxation by correcting the bioelectrical short-circuiting that triggers bodily reactions. You may think of EFT as a tool to “reprogram” your circuitry.

EFT is a form of psychological acupressure, based on the same energy meridians used in traditional acupuncture for more than 5,000 years to treat physical and emotional ailments, but without the invasiveness of needles. You may see a basic video teaching you techniques you can use at home before watching this video designed specifically to help with relaxation and destressing.

Simple Tricks to Help You Fall Asleep Faster

Along with taking a warm bath at least 90 minutes before going to bed, the following suggestions may also help you to fall asleep more quickly and enjoy more restful sleep. For a more comprehensive list you may want to read my previous article, [“Tools for Optimizing Sleep and Sleep-Wake Timing.”](#)

Turn your bedroom into an oasis for sleep – Your bed is a place to sleep and rest comfortably. Only two other activities will not significantly impede a restful sleep – reading and intimate relations with your significant other. Anything else, such as work, computers, cell phones or watching television will reduce the quality of your sleep.²⁸

Reduce any noisy interruptions from pets or outdoor activities. You might consider removing your pet from the bedroom or using a white noise machine to reduce interruptions from outdoor noises.

Establish a soothing pre-bedtime routine — Humans are creatures of habit. When you establish a soothing bedtime routine you go through each evening before bed, you're more likely to fall asleep easily. Activities such as a warm bath, reading a good book or relaxation exercises may help you fall asleep easier.

If you have trouble falling to sleep one night, it's better to leave the bedroom and read quietly than to try even harder to fall asleep. I would strongly recommend using blue-blocking glasses if you do this, to prevent your reading light from further depressing your melatonin production.

Keep a consistent schedule — When you go to bed and wake up at the same times, your body becomes accustomed to the routine. This helps regulate your circadian clock, so you fall asleep and stay asleep all night. Keep this routine even on the weekends.

Get plenty of bright sunlight exposure in the morning and at noon — Exposure to bright light first thing in the morning stops production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin and signals to your body that it's time to wake up. Outdoor sunlight is best, so you might even want to take a quick walk outside.

Not only will this increase in physical activity help you sleep later, but taking your walk outdoors — either first thing in the morning or around noon when the sun is high — gives you more exposure to bright sunlight.

At sundown, dim your lights (and/or use amber-colored glasses) — In the evening (around 8 p.m.) you'll want to dim your lights and turn off electronic devices. Normally, your brain starts secreting melatonin between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m., and these devices emit light that may stifle that process. After sundown, shift to a low-wattage incandescent bulb with yellow, orange or red light if you need illumination.

A salt lamp illuminated by a 5-watt bulb is an ideal solution that will not interfere with your melatonin production. If using a computer or smartphone, install blue light-blocking software like Iris – an improved version of f.lux.

The easiest solution, however, is to use amber-colored glasses that block blue light. I found an Uvex model (S1933X) on Amazon and works like a charm to eliminate virtually all blue light.

This way, you don't have to worry about installing programs on all your devices or buying special light bulbs for evening use. Once you have your glasses on, it doesn't matter what light sources you have on in your house.

Check your bedroom for electromagnetic fields (EMFs) – **EMFs** disrupt your pineal gland and the production of melatonin and serotonin, and may have other negative effects as well. To do this, you need a gauss meter. You can find various models online, starting around \$50 to \$200. Some experts even recommend pulling your circuit breaker before bed to kill all power in your house.

Exercise daily – Your body thrives on exercise and movement. It reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease and metabolic disorders. Exercise will help you get to sleep more easily and sleep more soundly. However, your body also releases cortisol during exercise, which may reduce your melatonin secretion. Exercise at least three hours before bed, and earlier if you can.

Keep your room cool – The optimal temperature for sleeping is between 60 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit. If your room is cooler or warmer, you may have a more restless night's sleep. During sleep your body's core temperature drops to the lowest level during a 24-hour period. The cooler your room is, the more conducive it may be to your body's natural drop in temperature.

Sleep naked – **Sleeping naked** will help keep you cooler, and provides a number of other health benefits besides improving your chances of a good night's sleep.

Evaluate your mattress and pillow – You'll experience more restful sleep when your mattress and pillows are comfortable and supportive. You'll want to consider replacing your mattress after nine or 10 years, the average life expectancy of a good-quality mattress.

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