

Do Weighted Blankets Really Ease Stress and Anxiety?

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Weighted blankets, which are much heavier than regular blankets, deliver deep, steady pressure that helps calm the nervous system and makes it easier for you to relax and fall asleep
- › A study in China found that adults with diagnosed insomnia who used weighted blankets slept longer, fell asleep faster, and woke up less during the night compared to those using regular blankets
- › Research on psychiatric patients showed that weighted blankets not only improved insomnia but also reduced daytime fatigue, anxiety, and depression, giving people more energy and better functioning during the day
- › Real-world hospital studies confirmed that weighted blankets are safe for people under significant stress, with most participants reporting they felt calmer almost immediately after use
- › While results vary, consistent use of weighted blankets offers a drug-free option to improve both nighttime rest and daytime well-being, especially if you struggle with severe sleep problems or stress

The popularity of weighted blankets has soared in recent years, and many have jumped on the trend, claiming that these specialized comforters have helped improve their nightly sleep. These blankets don't just provide warmth; they also add steady, gentle pressure across your body, creating a sensation similar to being hugged or held.

As such, weighted blankets have been associated with certain health benefits, such as easing stress and alleviating anxiety, providing a more restful night's sleep. But does the research back up these claims?

What Are Weighted Blankets?

A weighted blanket is exactly what it sounds like – a specially made fabric that weighs much heavier than a regular blanket. It's often filled with glass beads, plastic pellets, or woven layers that add density and weight.

- **Are weighted blankets the same as comforters?** While they may appear the same, these two bedroom fabrics have different functions. Comforters simply act as an insulator to keep you warm, while weighted blankets are designed to put pressure on your body.¹
- **Weighted blankets were originally designed as therapeutic tools** – According to an article published by The Conversation, occupational therapists used these blankets for decades to help regulate sensory overload. They were used by children with autism and adults with sensory processing disorders during the 1970s.²
- **They entered mainstream markets in the 1990s** – However, these blankets only recently gained popularity with the general public, as manufacturers began targeting “casually anxious” people – those who are constantly overwhelmed by modern-day stress.
- **This marketing strategy worked** – Time magazine even named the weighted blanket one of the top 50 inventions of 2018. Today, weighted blankets can be purchased at different price points, ranging from 30 dollars up to several hundred dollars.³ Sales have surged in the past couple of years,⁴ as companies tout the many benefits of these blankets, from easing insomnia to reducing nighttime anxiety and providing stress relief.

- **Weighted blankets typically weigh around 2 to 13 kilograms (or 4 to 28 pounds) –** This allows it to deliver an effect called “deep pressure stimulation,” which provides gentle and even pressure on your body. This concept is similar to how infants are swaddled tightly to help them sleep better. For a weighted blanket to be effective, it needs to be at least 10% of your body weight.

Insomnia Patients in China Show Measurable Sleep Improvements with Weighted Blankets

In a 2024 prospective randomized controlled trial published in BMC Psychiatry, researchers in China conducted a pilot randomized controlled study to test whether weighted blankets improved sleep quality. The purpose was clear – to see if using heavier blankets offered measurable advantages in restoring better sleep for those already struggling with chronic insomnia.⁵

- **The participants were 102 adults who had been formally diagnosed with insomnia –** The study was carried out across three large hospitals in China and lasted for one month. The participants were randomly split into two groups – 52 received weighted blankets, while 50 used normal blankets. In the end, 95 participants completed the trial, and seven dropped out.
- **The researchers used questionnaires and surveys to track the results –** These surveys were done at three time points – before the intervention started, after one week, and again at one month. The participants were also instructed to wear actigraphy monitors, which are small wrist-worn devices that track movement and provide a reliable estimate of when someone is asleep versus awake.
- **The weighted blanket group reported better sleep compared to those who used a normal blanket –** This was based on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), wherein a lower score meant better sleep. On average, the weighted blanket group score went down by 4.1 points versus 2.0 points in the control group. Simply put, the weighted blanket group had almost twice the improvement.

- **The benefits weren't limited to sleep quality** – Participants also reported statistically significant improvements in other aspects, such as reduced daytime sleepiness, stress, anxiety, fatigue, and bodily pain. This is important because insomnia doesn't just affect your nights – it bleeds into how you feel and function all day, and ultimately contributes to your daily stress load. The findings suggest that weighted blankets improve not only nighttime rest but also daytime well-being.
- **Objective data confirmed the subjective reports** – The actigraphy monitors recorded that the weighted blanket group experienced longer total sleep time and better sleep efficiency than the control group. Sleep efficiency is a measure of how much of your time in bed is actually spent asleep, and higher efficiency means fewer wasted hours lying awake.
- **Interestingly, the biggest gains were seen in participants with more severe baseline insomnia** – In other words, those who were struggling the most at the start ended up benefiting the most from using a weighted blanket. This suggests that if you have severe insomnia, a weighted blanket might give you a stronger boost than it would for someone with milder symptoms.

The study's findings make weighted blankets an especially appealing tool for people hesitant to rely on sleep medications. Many prescription drugs for insomnia carry side effects such as grogginess, dependency, or memory impairment. This research provides another promising option – one that is safe, accessible, and works with your body's natural calming systems rather than overriding them.

*"In conclusion, our study showed positive effects of weighted blankets on sleep quality and a range of sleep-related negative emotions and daytime symptoms. Our findings provide promising preliminary evidence for the possible efficacy and safety of weighted blankets in sleep intervention, offering an easy-to-use non-pharmacotherapy option for adults with insomnia."*⁶

In Psychiatric Patients Struggling with Insomnia, Weighted Blankets Provide Lasting Relief

Insomnia is also a common occurrence among people who struggle with psychiatric disorders like depression and bipolar disorder and, according to research, a weighted blanket may provide some benefits for these groups. A 2020 randomized controlled study published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine provided more insight into this.⁷

- **The study involved 120 individuals diagnosed with different psychiatric conditions** – These include major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**. All the individuals were also struggling with insomnia.
- **The participants were randomly divided into two groups** – One group was assigned a weighted metal chain blanket, while the other was given a lighter plastic chain blanket. The lighter blanket acted as a control, so participants didn't know if they were in the active or comparison group. The participants used their assigned blanket for four weeks, using it as they slept at night.
- **The Insomnia Severity Index (ISI) was used to track their sleep quality** – This questionnaire quantifies how bad sleep difficulties are and how much they interfere with daily life. The participants also wore wrist actigraphy devices, which are like medical-grade fitness trackers that measure movement and rest patterns to estimate sleep and daytime activity levels.
- **At the four-week mark, the weighted blanket group showed significantly greater improvements compared to those who used the lighter blanket** – They experienced a large and significant reduction in ISI scores. Beyond insomnia severity, sleep maintenance improved, which means people using the weighted chain blanket woke up fewer times during the night and were able to stay asleep longer.
- **The benefits weren't limited to the night** – During the day, people in the weighted blanket group showed higher activity levels compared to those with the lighter blanket, as confirmed by the wrist-worn trackers. Higher daytime activity suggests more energy, better functioning, and improved ability to handle daily tasks.

- **There were also measurable reductions in daytime fatigue, depression, and anxiety** – This is a powerful finding because insomnia and psychiatric symptoms often feed into one another. Poor sleep worsens depression and anxiety, and those conditions in turn make it harder to sleep. By breaking this vicious cycle, the weighted blanket provided both nighttime and daytime relief.

Weighted Blankets Ease Stress for Adults in Psychiatric Care

A similar study published in *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health* evaluated how weighted blankets worked for adults during inpatient psychiatric hospitalization. The researchers wanted to know if these tools are safe for use in this vulnerable setting, and if they actually make a difference in stress levels. To answer this, they enrolled hospitalized adults with significant mental health challenges, creating one of the first real-world tests of weighted blanket use inside psychiatric care units.⁸

- **A total of 30 adult volunteers participated while hospitalized for mental health treatment** – This was significant because most earlier research had only involved non-hospitalized volunteers, so testing in this environment provided new insight into how weighted blankets work with people under intense stress.
- **The weighted blanket used was standardized at 30 pounds, ensuring that each participant experienced the same amount of pressure** – The researchers had three main hypotheses: first, that the weighted blanket would be safe for hospitalized adults, as proven by stable vital signs (like heart rate and blood pressure); second, that it would reduce anxiety in at least some participants; and third, that testing multiple measurement tools on a mixed population would reveal both inconsistencies and useful findings for future research.
- **To determine safety, the team tracked pulse rate, blood pressure, and pulse oximetry (measuring oxygen levels in the blood)** – These indicators were monitored before, during, and after using the blanket to ensure that the added

weight wasn't straining participants' cardiovascular or respiratory systems. The results showed that these measures stayed within safe ranges across the board, meaning the blanket did not put stress on the heart, lungs, or circulation.

- **To measure effectiveness, the researchers used three approaches** – The first was electrodermal activity, tracking subtle changes in how well the skin conducts electricity. Stress and anxiety increase sweat gland activity, so reduced skin conductivity during weighted blanket use would indicate relaxation.

Next, they used the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-10), a short questionnaire widely used to measure levels of anxiety. Lastly, they used a self-rating scale, where participants reported their own anxiety level in real time.

- **The participants reported better anxiety levels** – When asked to rate their own anxiety on a 0 to 10 scale, the majority of participants reported feeling calmer after the blanket session. In fact, 63% said their anxiety was lower, and 78% said they felt calmer overall. Many participants also showed reduced skin conductance during weighted blanket use, consistent with the shift from a stressed “fight-or-flight” state toward a calmer “rest-and-digest” state.
- **The rate of improvement was also fast** – Many participants felt calmer almost immediately after being given the weighted blanket, showing that the effect wasn't something that built up slowly over weeks but rather worked on the spot.

More Evidence Is Needed to Confirm the Benefits of Weighted Blankets

If you deal with racing thoughts, agitation, or overwhelming anxiety, the evidence suggests that wrapping yourself in a weighted blanket could provide a rapid, drug-free pathway to calmness and emotional balance. However, despite these positive results, there are still no formal recommendations as to whether weighted blankets truly bring about the benefits associated with them.

One reason for this is that the populations used in the studies, such as the ones discussed above, are typically small. Alicia Roth, Ph.D., a sleep medicine psychologist, pointed out, “The current studies on weighted blankets are small and have some limitations. So, we can’t definitively say that weighted blankets make a big difference.”⁹

- **The research on autism isn’t definitive as well** – In its guidelines published in 2020, the American Academy of Neurology addressed sleep problems in children and teens with autism, stating that while they’re generally safe, there’s “no evidence that routine use of weighted blankets or specialized mattress technologies improve sleep.”^{10,11}
- **Weighted blankets are helpful but are not a miracle cure** – While these reports show that weighted blankets can be a promising solution, take note that they could work for some people, but may not be as effective for others. As noted by Harvard Health Publishing, “If you do decide to try a weighted blanket, be realistic about your expectations and realize that results may vary.”¹²
- **There are some groups of people who are not recommended to use weighted blankets** – These include people with sleep apnea, certain sleep disorders, and respiratory problems. Very small or young children who may find the added weight too constrictive and may have difficulty moving under the blanket are also not advised to use one.

“People with diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea, COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], circulation problems, high blood pressure or claustrophobia should consult their GP before opting to use one,” The Conversation adds.¹³

- **If insomnia is the issue, it’s better to pinpoint the root cause** – **Insomnia** is not just an annoying disruption in your sleep – it’s also a sign that something is blocking your natural internal rhythm, and your body isn’t recovering the way it should. The good news is that there are safe and effective ways to reset your sleep.

- **Sleeping in total darkness and eliminating all electromagnetic fields (EMFs) in your bedroom is the first step** — Your body relies on light cues to know when it's time to rest. Even a small amount of light in your bedroom, like the glow from a digital clock or a streetlight through the window, disrupts melatonin production.

Meanwhile, having EMF sources in the bedroom — like your cellphone or even your Wi-Fi router — not only interferes with your nervous system's ability to rest, but also causes mitochondrial damage, DNA fragmentation, and neurological issues. For more useful strategies to improve your sleep, I recommend reading "[Top 33 Tips to Optimize Your Sleep Routine.](#)"

- **If you're struggling with stress and anxiety, consider natural stress relief techniques as well** — Having essential tools for managing stress and anxiety will help you navigate through difficult emotions. Many benefit from meditation and mindful observation, which can reduce the intensity of stress responses.

Regular exercise, hobbies like painting and gardening, and the Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) are some ways to help ease your stress. Read my article, "[Five Ways to Complete the Stress Cycle and Avoid Burnout](#)" for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Weighted Blankets

Q: What is a weighted blanket and how does it work?

A: A weighted blanket is heavier than a normal blanket because it's filled with materials like glass beads, metal chains, or layered fabric. The extra weight applies steady, gentle pressure across your body. This is called deep pressure stimulation, which signals your nervous system to relax, lowers stress hormones, and boosts calming chemicals like serotonin and melatonin. The result is a natural sense of calm and better sleep.

Q: Do weighted blankets actually improve sleep?

A: Studies found that people using weighted blankets had fewer nighttime awakenings, better overall sleep quality, and longer total sleep time. In one clinical trial, people with insomnia improved their sleep scores almost twice as much with weighted blankets compared to regular ones. Better sleep efficiency also meant less time lying awake in bed.

Q: Can weighted blankets help with anxiety and stress?

A: While there are still no formal recommendations on using a weighted blanket for stress relief, studies in both outpatient and inpatient psychiatric settings found that 63% to 78% of participants felt calmer and less anxious after using one. Some people reported feeling relief almost immediately.

Q: Are weighted blankets safe to use?

A: Research confirms they are safe for adults, including those with psychiatric disorders. Across multiple trials, no serious adverse effects were reported. Heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen levels remained stable, even with blankets weighing up to 30 pounds. The main advice is to make sure you can comfortably move under the blanket and avoid use in young children without supervision.

Q: Who benefits the most from weighted blankets?

A: While almost anyone can experience calming effects, the strongest benefits are seen in people with higher baseline stress, severe insomnia, or psychiatric conditions like depression and anxiety. Long-term studies also showed that

improvements last when weighted blankets are used consistently, with benefits continuing for up to a year. Even people who switched to weighted blankets later saw significant improvements.

Sources and References

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