How to fall asleep faster and sleep better

The mental health benefits of good sleep include boosting our mood, reducing stress and helping with anxiety.

If you're having trouble sleeping, knowing how to sleep better can make a big difference.

Find out more about ways to help you sleep, including sleep hygiene, and expert advice from a professor of sleep medicine at the University of Oxford.

1. Have good sleep routine (sleep hygiene)

Having a regular routine helps to improve sleep. It's sometimes called sleep hygiene.

A good sleep routine should include having a set time to start winding down – and a way to relax is important too.

Going to bed and getting up at fixed times is another good sleep habit.

Ideally, a sleep routine should be the same every day, including weekends.

2. Relax, unwind and try sleep meditation

Remember, your sleep routine starts before you get into bed, so build in time every evening to relax.

Avoid electronic devices at least an hour before bed, as mobiles, tablets and computers all throw out blue light that stops sleep.
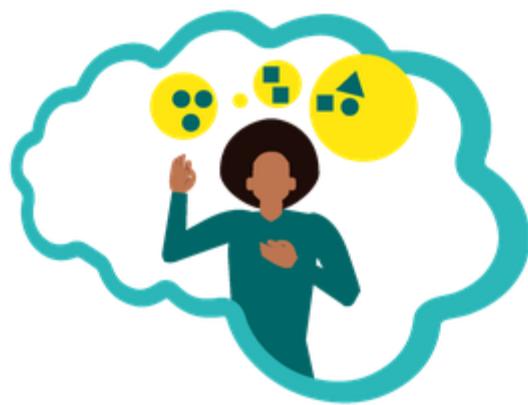
Reading, listening to soft music or a podcast, or sleep meditation can all help if you have trouble sleeping.

3. Try mindfulness for sleep

Anxiety, worry and stress can affect how well we sleep. Luckily, there are things you can do daily to help manage your worries, like talking to someone you trust or writing in a notebook about your concerns.

If you often lie awake worrying, set aside time before bed to make a to-do list for the next day – this can be a good way to put your mind at rest.

4. Create the right sleep environment

It's generally easier to drop off when it's quiet, dark and cool – although the right sleep environment is personal, so try different things and see what works for you.

Silence is golden when it comes to sleep for many of us, so wearing earplugs, putting your phone on silent (or out of the room entirely) can keep things quiet.

Good curtains or blinds can help to keep a room dark and avoid unwanted lights by keeping clocks out of view and phones facing down.

Make sure your room is the right temperature for you and well ventilated, as a cool room is usually better to sleep in than a hot or stuffy one.

Some people also find it helps to play music for sleep, such as ambient sounds like rainfall, gentle music or white noise.

5. Do not force sleep

If you're lying awake unable to sleep, do no not try to force it. If you're tired and enjoying the feeling of resting, then sleep may naturally take over.

But if you cannot sleep, get up and sit in a comfy place and do something relaxing, like reading a book or listening to quiet music. Only go back to bed when you feel sleepier.

6. Improve sleep through diet and exercise

A good diet and regular physical exercise can help us to relax and get better sleep. And the opposite is also true: an unhealthy diet and lack of exercise can stop us from sleeping well.

Avoid eating large meals close to bedtime. Try to also ditch the bedtime caffeine (like coffee) or nicotine if you can, because these are stimulants that make us more alert. Stimulants are a common cause of sleep problems.

Regular exercise helps with sleep, but avoid anything too energetic in the 90 minutes before bedtime if you find it stops you from sleeping.