

7 sleep mistakes doctors wish you'd stop making

Plopping straight into bed after a big dinner or too much time on TikTok? These bad habits could be ruining your rest.

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FYI, your bed is for sleeping, not eating, working or scrolling. (Getty)

No one can deny the importance of a [good night's sleep](#). Clocking a peaceful, uninterrupted [seven to nine hours](#) at night can really make you feel on top of the world, like you're ready to tackle anything that gets thrown your way. But when sleep doesn't come so easily, and you're [watching time tick away](#), you know the next day probably isn't going to be pretty.

If you're not getting great rest, here's the thing doctors want you to know: Many of the choices you make throughout the day have a significant impact on how well you slumber at night. A warm bedroom? Too much screen time? These are among the most common mistakes the experts say are sabotaging our sleep – but they're far from the only ones.

Ruining your sleep schedule on the weekends

I'll be the first to admit, few things bring me more joy than languishing in bed well past 10 on Sunday mornings. Unfortunately, we do ourselves no favors when we wake up and go to bed at different times.

“The weekend sleep roller-coaster is a killer, says [Dr. B. Stephen Sanders](#), a board-certified men's health physician based in Florida. “Many people are up late Friday and Saturday, then sleep in on Sunday, then try to force a Monday morning like nothing ever happened. This inconsistency messes with your circadian rhythm way more than you think.”

[Dr. Aaron Pinkhasov](#), a board-certified psychiatrist and chair of the department of psychiatry at NYU Grossman Long Island School of Medicine, backs this up. He says the most effective foundation for falling asleep faster is maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, including on the weekends. “This helps regulate your circadian rhythm, strengthen nighttime sleep drive and make sleep more predictable and restorative,” he says.

Not setting bed boundaries

Look, I get it. If you spend several hundred (err, thousand) dollars on one of the [best mattresses](#) out there, you want to get your money's worth. But using your bed as a home base for daily activities is a really bad idea.

“Reserve the bed for sleep and intimacy only,” urges [Dr. Jose Puangco](#), a neurologist and sleep medicine specialist at Hoag, a healthcare system in Southern Calif. “Good sleep quality comes from reinforcing the message that bed equals rest, not stress, work or scrolling.”

Eating and working in bed are off limits, but it doesn't stop there. If you're not sleeping, you gotta get out of bed.

“Staying in bed awake too long is a common mistake. When you lie there trying to force sleep, your brain starts to associate the bed with frustration instead of rest,” explains [Dr. Julia Whitaker](#), a board-certified sleep medicine specialist based in Colorado. Instead of just hanging out in bed when you can't sleep, she advises getting up for a few minutes and doing something calming in low light until you feel tired again.

Checking the clock in the middle of the night

What's the first thing most people do when they wake up in the middle of the night? Check the time, or worse, their phone. This is a big no-no.

Pinkhasov wants to reassure you that waking up briefly during the night is common and usually normal. When it happens, avoid looking at the time — even if that means removing the clock from your bedroom entirely. “Seeing the time can trigger anxious thoughts, and small amounts of light can further stimulate your brain. The goal is to keep your body and mind in ‘sleep mode’ when you wake up in the middle of the night,” he says. To do this, he suggests trying to recall happy memories, think about things you are grateful for or imagine pleasant, peaceful scenarios. “This mental focus reduces stress, keeps your mind calm, and helps you to go back to sleep,” he explains.

Not giving your body enough time to wind down

Would you dive right into a high-intensity workout without any stretching? Or walk into a big presentation without any practice runs? Similarly, sleep doesn’t just magically descend upon you because you’ve crawled into bed. You’ve got to do some prep work.

“You can’t physically run all day, then expect to just switch off at 10 p.m. and be ready for deep sleep,” Sanders says. It’s important to give your body signals that bedtime is coming at least 30–60 minutes before you lie down. “This might look like dimming the lights, getting the phone out of the bedroom, reading a few pages, stretching or breath work ... whatever helps you downshift your nervous system. Your brain needs a transition. You have to adequately set the stage for quality sleep,” Sanders explains.

Using alcohol as a sleep aid

Repeat after me: A glass of wine won’t help you sleep better. While it may make you feel drowsy and cause you to doze off, your rest will actually suffer in the long run.

Sanders shoots straight on this one: “Alcohol trashes your sleep quality. You might pass out faster, but you’re not getting that deep, restorative sleep your body actually needs and craves. The next morning, you wake up feeling like you got hit by a truck.”

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Eating and drinking too late

I know, I know. Sometimes the 9 p.m. dinner reservation is all that’s available. But feasting on a heavy dinner, then hopping into bed, is a recipe for disaster.

“What and when we eat or drink is one of the major factors that can quietly interfere with rest,” explains Pinkhasov. He recommends avoiding large meals high in fat, spice or acidity within a few hours of bedtime because they can cause indigestion or heartburn. Foods and beverages that are high in caffeine – think coffee, tea, soda, energy drinks and chocolate – can also disrupt sleep if consumed in the late afternoon or evening.

Keeping your bedroom too warm and too bright

Don’t expect to slip into a sweet slumber if you’ve got a [space heater](#) roaring, the [Bluetooth speaker](#) blasting and every [lamp](#) in the room turned on. Instead, you want your bedroom to feel like a cave when you’re going to sleep, advises [Dr. Fariha Abbasi-Feinberg](#), board-certified sleep medicine physician, neurologist and board member of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. “Make your bedroom quiet and relaxing and keep it at a comfortable, cool temperature.”

The level of warmth in your room is especially important, Sanders notes. “Your core body temperature has to drop for you to fall asleep, and a cool room makes this much easier. Aim for 65–68°F,” he says.