

Sleep: It's More Elusive as We Get Older

If someone tells you older people need less sleep than younger people do, don't believe it. Older Americans need about eight hours of sleep, just like everybody else. What's different is quality sleep is harder to come by as you age. There are a lot of reasons for it and you may be affected by more than one.¹

In *The Science of Sounder Sleep*, Ronda Kaysen explains, "In our 50s our ability to produce melatonin, a powerful sleep hormone, may begin to slow. And our circadian clock, the internal meter that tells us when to go to bed and when to get up, often shifts earlier when we age, sending us to bed in the early evening and awakening us in the early hours..."²

So, how do we make up for lost sleep time? Here are a few suggestions from the Mayo Clinic:

- **Be conscious of what you eat and drink.** Consuming large or heavy meals, spicy foods, or caffeine close to bedtime can make sleep less restful. Also, while alcohol may make you tired enough to fall asleep, it is likely to affect the quality of your slumber during the night.¹
- **Exercise regularly, but not before bedtime.** It's clear physical activity is good for your health. It can also help you sleep more soundly and can reduce insomnia. A brisk morning walk or an afternoon workout will do the trick. Just don't exercise too close to bedtime because that can keep you awake.¹
- **Stick with a sleep routine.** While it may be tempting to binge-watch your favorite show until you feel tired, sticking with the same routine every day will help your body's internal clock normalize, and that can help you sleep better.¹
- **Take time to wind down.** Make sure your routine includes an activity or two that induces relaxation. Take a warm bath, read a book (paper version), or play soothing music that lulls you to sleep. Reading, watching, or playing on bright screens should not be part of this routine. Bright screens can suppress the release of melatonin, the hormone that makes you sleepy.^{1, 3}
- **Talk to your doctor.** The inability to get a good night's sleep may be a side effect of the medications you take or it could signal an underlying health issue. Keep a journal of your sleep patterns and share any concerns with your doctor.^{1, 4}

Sleep has been studied for decades. Many have come to the conclusion it's as important to health and well-being as diet and exercise. Jeanne Duffy, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a sleep researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital, summed it up like this, "We used to think that sleep just made you feel better mentally...But as more and more research has been done on sleep, we now recognize it's important for many aspects of both physical health and mental health."⁵

The bottom line is sleep is important for your mind and body at every age. If you aren't sleeping well, document what's happening, and see a professional.

What's Your Favorite Comfort Food?

Eating a dish that brings back memories of childhood can be a comfort. Passing those recipes (and the comfort) from one generation to the next can be really satisfying. While food manufacturers make it easy to prepare some time-honored classics, like good old mac and cheese, there is nothing like making it from scratch. Here's a recipe that can be passed down through generations.

Mom's Favorite Baked Mac and Chees⁶

2 tablespoons butter
1/4 cup finely chopped onion
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 cups milk
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 (8-ounce) package elbow macaroni
2 cups shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
1 (8-ounce) package processed American cheese, cut into strips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).

Melt butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Sauté onion for 2 minutes. Stir in flour and cook 1 minute, stirring constantly. Stir in milk, salt, mustard, and pepper; cook, stirring frequently, until mixture boils and thickens.

Meanwhile, bring a pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add macaroni and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente; drain.

To the milk mixture add the Cheddar and American cheeses; stir until cheese melts. Combine macaroni and cheese sauce in a 2-quart baking dish; mix well.

Bake in preheated oven for 30 minutes, or until hot and bubbly. Let cool 10 minutes before serving.

What Do You Know About Sleep Around the World?

When you think about cultural differences, especially in the context of traveling to other countries, the first things that come to mind are probably language, food, and social customs. Sleep offers some surprises overseas, too. See what you know about sleeping abroad by taking this quiz.

1. Where have some companies accepted napping at work as a way to improve workers' focus and motivation?
 - a. Netherlands
 - b. Japan
 - c. United Kingdom
 - d. Lebanon

2. Where do groups or tribes sleep whenever they feel like sleeping?
 - a. Zaire
 - b. Botswana
 - c. Paraguay
 - d. All of the above.

3. Do men or women snore more at night, in general, around the world?
 - a. Men
 - b. Women
 - c. Neither

4. Where do people go to sleep the earliest?
 - a. United States
 - b. South Africa
 - c. Norway
 - d. Korea

Not Everything has been Invented Yet

The *Punch Almanack for 1899* offered a joke that has proven to have staying power. It goes like this:⁷

Genius: Isn't there a clerk who can examine patents?

Boy: Quite unnecessary, Sir. Everything that *can* be invented has been invented.

One hundred and nineteen years later, *Popular Science Magazine* showcased 2018's best inventions.⁸ Last year's award-winners included:

Sidewalks that help stop floods: Changing weather patterns are affecting many regions across the United States. Sea levels are expected to rise and flooding may become more frequent. One way to address the issue is with porous sidewalk tiles designed to divert rain from overflowing drains into underground storage that can be used to water plants and trees. Excess drainage flows into sewer systems.⁹

Medicine that prevents migraines. If you are one of the millions of Americans who get migraines, you know how debilitating they can be. One of 2018's top inventions is a migraine preventative. It's administered through monthly injections and "blocks a neurotransmitter...which stimulates brain cells active in migraines." Tests suggest it reduces the number of headaches people experience every month by half.¹⁰

Headsets that terrify and delight. To enjoy an immersive virtual reality (VR) experience, people have had to invest in high-end gaming computers that have a big price tag. Last year, a standalone VR headset became available that can make users believe a zombie really is right behind them (and who doesn't want that?). It also has applications in entertainment, social interactions, and other areas outside of gaming.¹¹

What will be the next big thing? You can be sure inventors are working on it right now.

Quiz Answers:

1. **Japan.** Some companies are creating special rooms for napping.¹²
2. **All of the above.** Anthropologists have found in these countries, "...people sleep when they feel like it – during the day, in the evening, in the dead of night."¹³
3. **Men.**¹⁴
4. **South Africa.**¹⁴



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Sources:

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- ⁴ <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/sleep-deprivation-and-deficiency> (How to Discuss Sleep With Your Doctor)
- ⁵ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/03/harvard-researcher-sheds-light-on-links-between-sleep-and-health/>
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