



BY JODI HELMER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DONNA TROPE

A person's hand is pointing towards a book on a wooden shelf. The background is a blurred image of a bookshelf filled with books. The overall color palette is muted, with browns, greys, and soft blues.

Help! I Can't...

You might be surprised at the things in your life that have you counting sheep—and, no, we're not talking about car alarms, caffeine, or that elusive pea! Read on to learn about five factors that may be robbing you of quality shut-eye.

SLEEP!

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o you feel like it's getting harder to drop off—or that you're dragging even after you log plenty of mattress time? You're not alone. There's a reason the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention started calling insufficient sleep a public health epidemic a couple of years ago. Good, restorative slumber has become a scarce commodity in our nonstop world, and not getting enough of it has been linked to a number of health problems, including weight gain, decreased immune function, heart disease, diabetes, and depression.

"Sleep is just as important to your well-being as exercising and eating well—and quantity and quality both matter," says Stuart Quan, M.D., senior physician in the division of sleep medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

But what if you're following all the rules of the Insomniac's Sacred Creed (avoiding that after-dinner coffee or nightcap, chilling for an hour before bed, and wearing earplugs) and you're still tossing and turning? Turns out there are some less-obvious culprits that could be cutting short your forty winks. Here's what may be keeping you up, plus simple tweaks that will help you rest easy tonight—and every night after that.

SLEEP SABOTEUR #1 Your Smartphone

Knowing that your friends and colleagues can ping you at any hour might seem comforting, but being tethered to technology 24/7 makes you so accustomed to interruptions that your stress level spikes and stays elevated throughout the day and into the night. In fact, researchers from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden found that 34 percent of women who made or received at least 11 phone calls and sent or received more than 11 text messages daily—not an inordinate amount—suffered from insomnia and fragmented sleep.

Even worse is sitting in bed tweeting about *The Bachelor* or texting your BFF about your plans for tomorrow. That's simply too much mental activity late in the evening, and the backlit display adds stimulation as well. New research published in the journal *Applied Ergonomics* found that using an iPad for two hours before bed suppressed levels of melatonin, the hormone that helps regulate sleep and wake cycles, by 22 percent. "Exposure to light—especially blue wavelengths—resets your circadian clock and signals your body that it's time to wake up," explains Quan.

SACK-TIME SAVIORS

In a word: Unplug. Power down your phone—or at least turn off the ringer—for a few hours during the day, especially when you need to focus, says Sara Thomée, lead author of the Gothenburg study. At night, put your cell to bed altogether and rely on your landline. If you don't have one, at least silence the texting and email alerts till

the a.m. (If anyone's having a true emergency, they'll call!)

Then, at least an hour before you plan to turn in, shut down your computer and use your tablet for recreational reading only. If you do plan to catch up on that novel in bed, dim your device's display and limit your time to less than an hour; the *Applied Ergonomics* study showed there was no significant disruption in melatonin production in people who were exposed to backlit displays for fewer than 60 minutes.

SLEEP SABOTEUR #2 Your Period

The approaching visit from Aunt Flo could be screwing up your date with the sandman. About 33 percent of women have trouble sleeping for up to three nights before their periods start, according to research sponsored by the National Sleep Foundation.

Bloating, backaches, and breast tenderness could be to blame for your restlessness, but another cause may be a shift in progesterone, a hormone released during ovulation that has sedative effects. Levels drop dramatically right before your period, making you more alert, explains study coauthor Fiona Baker, Ph.D., a scientist at the California-based nonprofit research firm SRI International.

SACK-TIME SAVIORS

If OTC meds (like Midol) don't help, hormonal birth control might. "The Pill may alleviate premenstrual

insomnia by balancing out your hormones," says Phil Gehrman, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and researcher at the Penn Sleep Center.

If your sleeplessness is accompanied by depression or extreme irritability, ask your doctor whether you might have a condition called premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). If you do, says Baker, a pill like Yaz may be more effective because you have fewer periods each year. For some women with more serious mood issues, an antidepressant like Prozac or Paxil—taken only in the two weeks leading up to your period—can be helpful.

Dream On!
32 PERCENT
OF PEOPLE
WOULD BE
WILLING TO
GIVE UP A
BONUS OR
A RAISE AT
WORK TO
SLEEP BETTER
AT NIGHT.

SOURCE: BRAUN RESEARCH/PFIZER
CONSUMER HEALTHCARE

SLEEP SABOTEUR #3 Your Allergies

If you're a frequent sneezer and wheezer, you're probably already stockpiling antihistamines to help you breathe all day and night. But many people who don't think they have allergies actually suffer from them while snoozing, says Joseph

HAIR: BRADLEY IRION/ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PIRANO FOR ORIBE; MAKEUP: BRIAN DUPREY/JUDY CASEY FOR NARS; MANICURE: OLYA TITOVA/JUDY CASEY FOR SEPHORA BY OPI; PROP STYLING: EMILY KRACAJER; PREVIOUS SPREAD: EBERJEY BRA; COSABELLA PANTIES; MODEL'S OWN SOCKS; THIS SPREAD: COSABELLA SLIP; MARY GREEN SLEEP MASK



SLEEP “RULES” IT’S OKAY TO BREAK

RULE: Shoot for a full eight hours

REALITY: “There’s no evidence that we all need this amount,” says sleep specialist Michael Breus. Anything between six and nine is normal, provided you feel well rested in the morning and throughout the day. (Less than six increases moodiness and decreases alertness and reaction time, while more than nine could signal depression.)

RULE: Ban pets from the bedroom

REALITY: Nine percent of pet owners share their beds with them, according to the National Sleep Foundation, and for many people that works just fine, says Breus. “As long as you don’t have an allergy to their dander and they aren’t disrupting you, there’s no reason to shoo them out of the bedroom.”

RULE: Turn off late-night TV

REALITY: Yes, that screen emits blue light, and some programs—say, an action-packed adventure—can overstimulate you. But if tuning into *The Colbert Report* helps you unwind, it may actually be beneficial. “An enormous number of people can’t sleep because they’re stressed out,” says Breus. “For them, it’s better to be distracted from worries than to toss and turn for hours.” Just remember to set the timer so the TV isn’t blaring all night.

Ojile, M.D., founder and CEO of the Clayton Sleep Institute in St. Louis.

“Being even mildly allergic to something in your bedroom, such as mold or dust mites, can cause your nasal passages to swell, which makes it harder to sleep soundly,” says Ojile. (Microscopic dust mites cause allergies for up to 20 million Americans—and their favorite place to hide out is in bedding.) The irritation may make you

sleep much more lightly or cause you to have a coughing fit, which could completely rouse you.

Telltale signs of nighttime allergies include waking up with a sore throat, dry mouth, and congestion. A recent literature review published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* noted that sleep-disordered breathing (including snoring) is also more common in allergy sufferers. “Airflow resistance increases, making it more

difficult to breathe when you lie down,” explains Ojile.

SACK-TIME SAVIORS

Go after possible triggers. Invest in hypoallergenic pillows, pillowcases, and mattress covers, and wash linens weekly in hot water. Replace pillows at least every few years to avoid a buildup of mites.

Before bed, Ojile recommends using a saline nasal spray (in addition to taking an oral antihistamine if your

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symptoms are bad), which can help open your airways and make it easier to breathe. An air purifier with a HEPA filter may also be beneficial, because it pulls allergens out of the air.

However, if your partner says you sound like a buzz saw—or you wake up gasping—see your doctor. You may have sleep apnea, a condition in which you stop breathing for several seconds at a time during the night. That disrupts your periods of deep slumber and deprives your brain of some oxygen; left untreated, it raises your risk of diabetes and heart disease.

SLEEP SABOTEUR #4

Your Tummy

It's a no-brainer that the discomfort of heartburn, whether brought on by a late-night meal of spicy wings and beer or any other instigator, can keep you up. But sometimes reflux—which occurs when acid from your stomach washes up into the esophagus—can plague you in the night without your knowledge, says Michael Breus, Ph.D., a Scottsdale, AZ–based clinical psychologist and author

of *The Sleep Doctor's Diet Plan: Lose Weight Through Better Sleep*.

“Silent reflux, which occurs without

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the usual signs—like chest pain or trouble swallowing—puts you into a lighter stage of sleep,” explains Breus. “It might not bring you all the way to full consciousness, but you won't be getting the solid rest your body needs.”

SACK-TIME SAVIORS

Treating a problem you're not sure you have is tricky. Breus' suggestion: If you often feel sleepy and sluggish even after clocking extra hours, and notice that you're hoarse on waking, try taking an antacid before bed for a few days. If you feel more refreshed, chances are good that you've found the culprit. Be sure to tell your doctor at your next checkup, but the solution might be as simple as chewing a Tums tablet each evening.

A few other behavioral tweaks may help too. Breus recommends cutting back on citrus, tomatoes, chocolate, soda, and fatty and spicy foods during the day, and popping some chewing gum before bedtime. “It gets the saliva flowing, which neutralizes stomach acid.” Once you're tucked in, try to sleep on your left side. Research published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that leaning on your right aggravates reflux because it relaxes the muscle between the stomach and the esophagus, making it easier for acid to flow where it doesn't belong.

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SLEEP SABOTEUR #5 *Your Thermostat*

There are few things cozier than donning your favorite flannel pajamas on a winter's night and settling in under a mountain of downy blankets. But the added warmth can really interfere with your zzz's, especially if the heat in your room is also cranked up.

"Your body temperature normally drops at night, which is a signal to your brain that it's time to sleep," explains Amy Korn-Reavis, the clinical coordinator of a sleep lab in Orlando. When you're too hot, you're likely to spend less time in the deeper stages of slumber, according to recent research published in the *Journal of Physiological Anthropology*. Or you may even wake up in the wee hours—for instance, to toss off the covers or slip out of your pj bottoms.

SACK-TIME SAVIORS

Cool down before bed by setting the thermostat below 68°F (research shows that a bedroom between 60°F and 68°F is ideal), and avoid strenuous exercise within two hours of turning in for the night. Also consider taking a warm bath or shower; your body temperature will lower when you get out of the water.

Next, ditch synthetic threads in favor of natural fibers, which are more breathable, or special moisture-wicking "performance" sheets, says Korn-Reavis. If you often wake up in a sweat, consider Sacred Sleep, a line of sheets made from a blend of eucalyptus fibers with natural cooling properties (\$200 for a queen set; sacredsleep.com), or Sheex (\$200 for a queen set; sheex.com), which are composed of materials often found in athletic wear. Does your favorite foam contour pillow also get a bit steamy? Swap it for a model from the new Dr. Breus Pillow Collection (from \$90; thedrbreuspillow.com). Covered in Coolmax, another type of athletic fabric, it's designed to draw heat away from your body—ensuring you have a long, cool, restful night.

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