



What's Actually Ruining Your Sleep

Evidence-based fixes that don't cost a thing.

Most sleep advice is generic and incomplete. Here's what the research actually says — including several things that might surprise you.

THE ONE THING — Get bright light within 30 minutes of waking. Morning sunlight resets your entire circadian clock for the day. It controls when you feel sleepy, how deeply you sleep, and your stress hormone levels. Free. Takes 10 minutes. Changes everything downstream. If you do nothing else on this list, do this.

The 5 Real Disruptors — and the Free Fixes

1. Light Timing (The Biggest Lever)

The problem: Bright light in the evening delays your body's sleep signals. Your brain interprets it as daytime and pushes your sleep window later.

The fix: Dim all lights — not just screens, but overhead lights too — 2 hours before bed. Aim for under 50 lux (candle-level brightness).

Myth busted: Blue-light filters cause only ~3 minutes of sleep delay. Total light intensity and stimulating content are the real problems.

2. Temperature (Most Overlooked)

The problem: Your core body temperature must drop about 1°F to fall asleep. A warm room works against this.

The fix: Keep your bedroom at 65–68°F. Take a warm shower or bath 1–2 hours before bed — counterintuitively, this helps you cool down by flushing heat through your skin to the surface.

Quick win: If you wake up hot, remove one blanket layer before bed.

3. Caffeine (Dose + Timing, Not Just "Stop Drinking Coffee")

The problem: Caffeine's half-life is 4–6 hours, but 25% remains in your system after 10 hours. Many people are sensitive without realizing it.

The fix: Cut off caffeine at least 8 hours before bed (before 2 PM if you sleep at 10 PM). One cup of tea at 6 PM is fine; a full coffee is not.

Hidden sources: Decaf still has 10–15 mg per cup. Some pain relievers contain 65 mg of caffeine. Many pre-workouts contain 200+ mg.

4. Alcohol (The Invisible Thief)

The problem: Alcohol helps you fall asleep but devastates sleep architecture. Even 1–2 drinks significantly suppress deep sleep and REM sleep. You sleep longer but wake up feeling unrested — the damage is invisible.

The fix: Stop drinking at least 3–4 hours before bed, not just "before bed." The nightcap habit may be costing you 30–60 minutes of quality sleep without you knowing it.

5. Screens (It's the Content, Not the Blue Light)

The problem: Scrolling social media, watching stimulating videos, and reading stressful news keeps your brain in an alert state — regardless of the screen brightness.



The fix: Stop engaging content (social media, news, shopping) 30 minutes before bed. Passive content — reading a book, listening to calm audio — is far less disruptive. The blue-light filter won't fix stimulating content.

Know Your Type

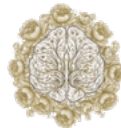
Your chronotype (natural morning vs. night person) is roughly 50% genetic. Forcing yourself to sleep on a schedule that fights your biology causes “social jetlag,” which is linked to worse health outcomes. **Consistency matters more than the specific hour: 7 hours at the same time every night is more restorative than 9 hours at varying times.**

If you only change one thing tonight: Put your phone face-down across the room 30 minutes before bed — not for the light, but because you'll stop doom-scrolling. Then get sunlight within 30 minutes of waking tomorrow. These two habits together shift sleep quality measurably within a week.

Sources

- NIH/PubMed: [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3805807](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3805807) (caffeine and sleep)
- NIH/PubMed: [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6491889](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6491889) (temperature and sleep)
- Sleep Foundation: sleepfoundation.org/nutrition/alcohol-and-sleep
- Sleep Foundation: sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/chronotypes
- The Conversation: theconversation.com (blue light — only 2.7 minutes of delay)
- Academic sleep research: academic.oup.com/sleep (stress, cortisol, and sleep quality)

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