



Something Wrecking Your Sleep?

Here are 13 surprising things that could explain your sleep woes



BY DR MICHAEL J. BREUS

ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTY IMAGES



YOU'RE TAKING YOUR MULTIVITAMIN AT NIGHT

You probably know that many medications – from allergy medications to statins to antidepressants – can disrupt your sleep. But some vitamins can, too. In particular, B vitamins can interfere with your nightly rest. There's evidence suggesting vitamin B6 may trigger vivid and bizarre dreaming, which is more likely to wake you during the night. And research shows vitamin B12 may increase your sensitivity to light, inhibiting the sleep hormone melatonin and disrupting normal sleep-wake rhythms. The best time to take a multivitamin? In the morning after breakfast.

YOU EAT CHOCOLATE AT NIGHT

I love a square or two of dark chocolate as a treat. But I avoid eating

chocolate before bed, and I suggest my patients do the same. Chocolate has several health benefits but it's not a sleep-promoter. Chocolate is an often-overlooked source of caffeine. The greater the cocoa content, the higher the caffeine level in chocolate. If you're making the healthier choice by opting for dark chocolate, and having it as a before-bed snack, you're getting an extra, unwelcome jolt of caffeine when you least need it. Plan to get your chocolate fix earlier in the day, and try more sleep-friendly nighttime snacks such as a banana, toast with nut butter, or a small bowl of whole-grain, low-sugar cereal.

SUGARY SNACKS BEFORE BED ARE YOUR THING

It's not only chocolate that can be problematic for sleep – other sugary foods can disrupt sleep, too. Most people love a sweet treat at the end of the day but feeding those cravings for sweet food before bed elevates blood sugar. A jump in blood sugar – and the crash that follows – can have negative effects on sleep.

YOUR BEDROOM IS TOO QUIET

As a sleep specialist, I spend plenty of time talking to patients about



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reducing noise in their sleep environment. But sometimes the problem isn't too much noise, it's too much silence. In a perfectly quiet bedroom, every little random sound can trigger your brain to attention. For people who need to calm a racing mind at night in order to drift off, a silent bedroom can get in the way of sleep. The best sounds for sleep? They vary from person to person but are often rhythmic sounds that mimic nature or mixed-frequency sounds such as white noise and pink noise.

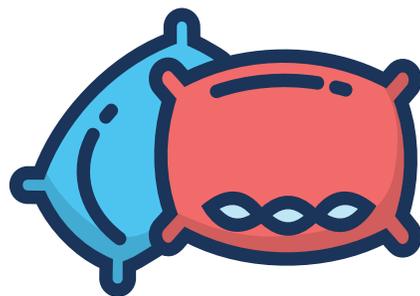
PEPPERMINT IS PART OF YOUR NIGHTLY ROUTINE

Whether it's in your toothpaste or your nightly cup of herbal tea, peppermint can have a stimulating effect. A 2005 study found people exposed to peppermint oil (in a darkened room, no less) experienced a decrease in their sleepiness. Citrus, eucalyptus and rosemary are other scents that energise and wake the mind. If you're struggling to nod off at night, swap out your mint tea for a more relaxing brew, such as chamomile or jasmine, and consider switching to a less minty toothpaste.

YOU DON'T WASH YOUR PILLOWS

Bed pillows collect a lot of pretty gross stuff: dirt, dead skin, hair, mould, fungus, pet dander, dust

mites... you get the picture. These substances can cause allergy symptoms (think sneezing, coughing, runny and itchy nose and eyes) that interfere with sleep. Allergies are also linked to sleep disorders. A 2005 study found people with allergies are nearly twice as likely to have insomnia. And allergies are also a risk factor for obstructive sleep apnoea, according to research. Washing your pillows a couple of times a year is a smart move from a hygiene perspective and can ensure they last for a good few years.



THE MOON IS FULL

It's not just daylight and darkness that affect sleep cycles. The phases of the moon can also have a significant impact on sleep. In a 2013 study published in the journal *Current Biology*, Swiss scientists found that around the time of a full moon, people sleep less (an average of 20 minutes), take

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longer to fall asleep, and sleep less soundly. They also found our bodies produce less melatonin and spend less time in deep, slow-wave sleep. Social media is another big cause of sleeplessness.

DINNER IS YOUR BIGGEST MEAL OF THE DAY

During sleep, your metabolic system repairs and restores itself, and your digestive system gets a welcome, important rest. If you eat a big meal at the end of the day, especially if you eat a late dinner very close to bedtime, your digestive system is kicking into action right when you're headed for bed. That's not good for your metabolic health. A 2017 study found that shifting eating to later in the day contributes to weight gain, higher cholesterol and insulin levels, and increased risks for heart disease and diabetes. It also can be disruptive to sleep.

YOUR DINNER IS EXTRA SPICY

Plenty of heat and spice can make for a great meal, but it might wreck your slumber. The chemical capsaicin, found in capsicum and chilli peppers, triggers a process known as thermogenesis - that's when the body converts energy into heat. Eating a lot of spicy food may raise body temperature slightly. Why does that matter

to sleep? Body temperature naturally lowers at night as part of the body's preparation for sleep, so spicy food may send your body temperature in the wrong direction. Spicy food can also trigger heartburn, which can become worse when you lie down, making it tough to fall asleep. And when you're sleep deprived you actually end up overeating, which could lead to weight gain.



YOU LOVE A TWISTY MYSTERY

If you're watching intense, fast-paced TV shows right up until bedtime, it might not be the light from the screen that's derailing your sleep. It could be the story itself that's keeping you awake. *Game of Thrones* is great, but it's not exactly sleep-promoting fare for many of us. The mental stimulation of dramatic, complicated and suspenseful shows (and even a really



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gripping book) activates the very areas of our brain we need to quiet down in order to fall asleep and sleep soundly.

GOOD NEWS CAME YOUR WAY

Landed a promotion at work? Planning your wedding or a move to your dream home? New grandchild on the way? Happy and exciting life events can disrupt sleep, just as stressful and difficult ones can. Acute insomnia – short periods of trouble sleeping that last from a few days to a few weeks – is often triggered by significant or unexpected developments in life, both positive and negative. If your life is coming up roses these days, you still need to pay attention to your sleep – and you may need to give your sleep routine some extra TLC.

YOU DO WORK IN BED

It's a mantra of sleep specialists like me: your bed is for sleep (and sex), only. When you need to work at home, it can be tempting to set yourself up in this most comfortable of places. But if you're working in bed – during the day or at night before sleep – you're creating associations with your sleep space that you can't just undo. Pressure and productivity, stress and deadlines, and focus and alertness are some of the work-related realities that are best kept far from your bedroom.

YOU HAVE A THYROID DISORDER

This small gland located at the base of your throat produces hormones that regulate metabolism and brain activity. And when it isn't functioning properly, it can cause problems for sleep. An overactive thyroid stimulates the nervous system, causing you to feel wired, restless and alert – making it difficult to fall asleep. When the thyroid is underactive, you tend to feel sleepy and fatigued all the time, which can lead you to sleep at the wrong times, disrupting a normal routine of nightly rest. Another symptom of an underactive thyroid? Feeling cold all the time, which also can interfere with sleep. Thyroid conditions often go undiagnosed – but a simple blood test can determine if you have a thyroid issue that's disrupting your sleep. [®]



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