



# How to Get Sleep When You're Stressed

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**D**entistry is stressful. In order to avoid becoming overwhelmed by tension created by patients, treatments, procedures and the business aspects of the profession, we encourage dentists to incorporate a wellness plan into their daily activities. No wellness plan is complete without recognizing the importance of a good night's sleep. But if you're under stress, how are you supposed to fall and stay asleep?

When you were a child, you probably had a sleep routine. Maybe your parents helped you into your pajamas and then read you a bedtime story. Maybe they tucked in your blanket, gave you a kiss and turned off the light. These activities signaled that the day had ended and it was time to rest. The concept was to soothe, calm, lower blood pressure and make a smooth segue from the hectic activities of daytime to the restorative sleep of nighttime. Assuming that you no longer live with your parents, you now need to do the work of creating your own sleep routine and soothing and calming yourself.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Prepare for the morning.** Sometimes it's hard to fall asleep because you're thinking about everything you need to do when you wake up. In this case, do what you can before you go to sleep, and make a list of what needs to be done after you wake up. The next time you're having trouble falling asleep because you keep thinking about something you need to do in the morning, get up and do it; then see if your brain can relax. If it does, you can make it a habit to postpone bedtime until you're done preparing everything you need to begin the next day.
- **Turn off your technology.** Eliminate distractions by shutting down your electronic signals. Once you've disconnected yourself from your electronics, it may be easier for your mind to rest. Research also suggests that blue light emitted from electronic screens prevents sleep.
  - **Phone.** Do you really need to sleep with the phone next to your bed? Unless you're on call, what phone call or text could possibly be so important that it can't wait until the morning?
  - **Television.** TV content is almost always stimulating, and stimulation is not conducive to sleep. The light and sound disrupt sleep patterns. If you have a sleep partner who needs the TV on, consider earplugs and a sleep mask (or work on your negotiation skills).



- **Computer.** In addition to the sleep disruptions created by the light and sound of a computer, emails can be emotionally agitating. Give yourself a daily cutoff time for reading emails, and turn the computer off to avoid the disruption.
- **Control your environment.** Do you wake up sweating? Open the windows, and lower the temperature before getting into bed. Do you get thirsty during the nighttime? Keep a bottle of water near you when you sleep. Does the sun wake you in the morning? Get some blackout shades. Try to analyze where you sleep best, then replicate those conditions in your daily sleep routine.
- **Read.** You may find it relaxing and helpful to read before bed. Just stay away from electronic devices. This may be a good time for catching up on some dental journal articles.
- **Practice yoga and meditation.** If you still can't wind down, try 15 minutes of yoga or meditation. There are many phone apps that will lead you through simple, restorative practices. In addition to clearing your mind, you may find that releasing your cramped muscles helps align you for more restful sleep.
- **Keep a notebook by your bed.** Sometimes you wake up to a thought and find it hard to get back to sleep. Instead of continuing to think about it so you don't lose it, write down your thought, and give yourself permission to get back to it in the morning. Once you know your thought has been given some permanence, you may find the freedom to return to sleep.

If you truly can't sleep, stop trying. Rather than staying in bed and panicking, get up and do something repetitive and boring, but productive. If that doesn't make you sleepy, at least you'll feel better about starting the next morning knowing that you already have something done. ♦

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