Dear Alice,

I can't go to sleep at night. What are some helpful ways to help me go to sleep faster?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Sleep can sometimes prove elusive. The toll of being tired is nothing to yawn at, especially when you have to be up and at 'em early in the morning for work, study, or even play. If you've been consistently unable to fall asleep at night, you're probably beyond counting sheep and drinking a glass of warm milk before bed. At this point, it is important to consider what outside factors may be contributing to your difficulty falling asleep.

Have you thought of your nighttime habits and how they might impact your ability to get to sleep? For example, is there something keeping you up at night? While there are many different conditions that can keep you from getting shut-eye, some are under your control. Troubles getting to sleep can be caused by an eye-opening number of factors, including:

- Exercising too close to bedtime
- Eating energizing foods and drinks before bed? such as sugary desserts, coffee, and caffeinated soda
- Going directly from working/studying to bed without a break
- Noise
- Light (including the glow from your cell phone, computer, or television)
- Uncomfortable room temperatures (usually too warm)
- A tossing and turning bedmate
- Fear of the dark
- Illness, or a chronic condition such as arthritis and/or allergies
- Not being tired
- Anxiety about that day, the next day, or everyday
- An inability to stop thinking about the day's events
Ask yourself if any of the above factors are keeping your eyes wide open. Remedies to the more physical and environmental sleep-deprivers—exercising, eating, noise, etc.—are fairly obvious, although not always easily employed. At the end of the day, however, Go Ask Alice! readers most often point to the last two items on the above list as the primary culprits keeping them up. So, if you're in the majority, here are some do-it-yourself suggestions:

- **Do something you really enjoy prior to bed time.** You can take a walk, chat with a friend, watch an amusing re-run, read something not related to school or work, take a bath, masturbate, etc. The idea here is to take your mind away from whatever's feeding your angst, allowing for greater ease into slumber.

- **Make tomorrow's to-do list just before you call it a night.** Not only might you be more organized for the next day, you may also have fewer anxiety dreams and a better night's sleep overall.

- **Instead of just lying awake with worries, write them down in a journal.** When you're done, close the book and put it away. Better to leave your stressors on the night table than take them to bed with you.

- **Listen to music or a guided imagery tape to take you peacefully into Zzz-land.** You can find relaxation videos online that have pleasant scenes in which you visualize yourself relaxing.

If these suggestions alone aren't enough to extract the roots of the factors that are causing you lost sleep, combining them with some kind of counseling or speaking with a health care provider can be a sleep tonic worth considering.

Alice!
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