



HOW TO SLEEP BETTER

Your guide to managing sleep during the menopause transition with practical, proven tools for you to try out, shared by our team of specialists



SLEEP AND MENOPAUSE

Sleep disorders affect 39–47% of perimenopausal women and 35–60% of postmenopausal women. This is because of hormone drops:

- ✦ Low oestrogen is associated with poor-quality sleep, reducing deep sleep and triggering night sweats which may disrupt sleep
- ✦ Low progesterone can make some people feel anxious, making it hard to drift off to sleep but also more prone to waking up in the middle of the night
- ✦ Low testosterone may cause daytime fatigue and suppress melatonin – a hormone that tells the brain it's time for bed and makes us sleepy

Over time, not getting enough quality sleep can impact our mood, ability to cope with stress, cause weight gain, brain fog, hot flushes and low immunity with insomnia linked to a higher risk of Alzheimer's. Sleep is essential to our well-being.

Studies show that HRT (particularly progesterone and testosterone) may help but there are plenty of lifestyle and natural tools we can implement too.

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to our well-being.**

SLEEP MYTHS

There are various myths around sleep when it comes to menopause, so it's worth taking note of these to avoid making matters worse ...

The more sleep you get the less tired you'll feel

Going to bed too early reduces our sleep drive, increasing our chances of waking in the night or feeling tired the next day.

Have a daytime nap if you feel tired

Napping in the day disrupts our circadian rhythms and reduces the production of melatonin that we need later on in the evening to make us feel sleepy.

Have a night cap for a good night's sleep

Alcohol does have a sedative effect so it may help us get off to sleep, but it also isn't processed that well by the liver as we get older, waking us up for a trip to the bathroom. Alcohol also spikes cortisol, so this can interrupt sleep, making us wake up in the night with palpitations or worries.





1 INCREASE YOUR SLEEP DRIVE

So, you're probably thinking the more I sleep, the better I'll feel. Actually, the optimum amount of sleep for the average person is 7-8 hours and most can function well on less. Sleeping longer than

this can actually make us feel more tired. Key to good sleep is having a high sleep drive – that means we are desperate to hit the sheets, and fall asleep quickly within 15-30 minutes.

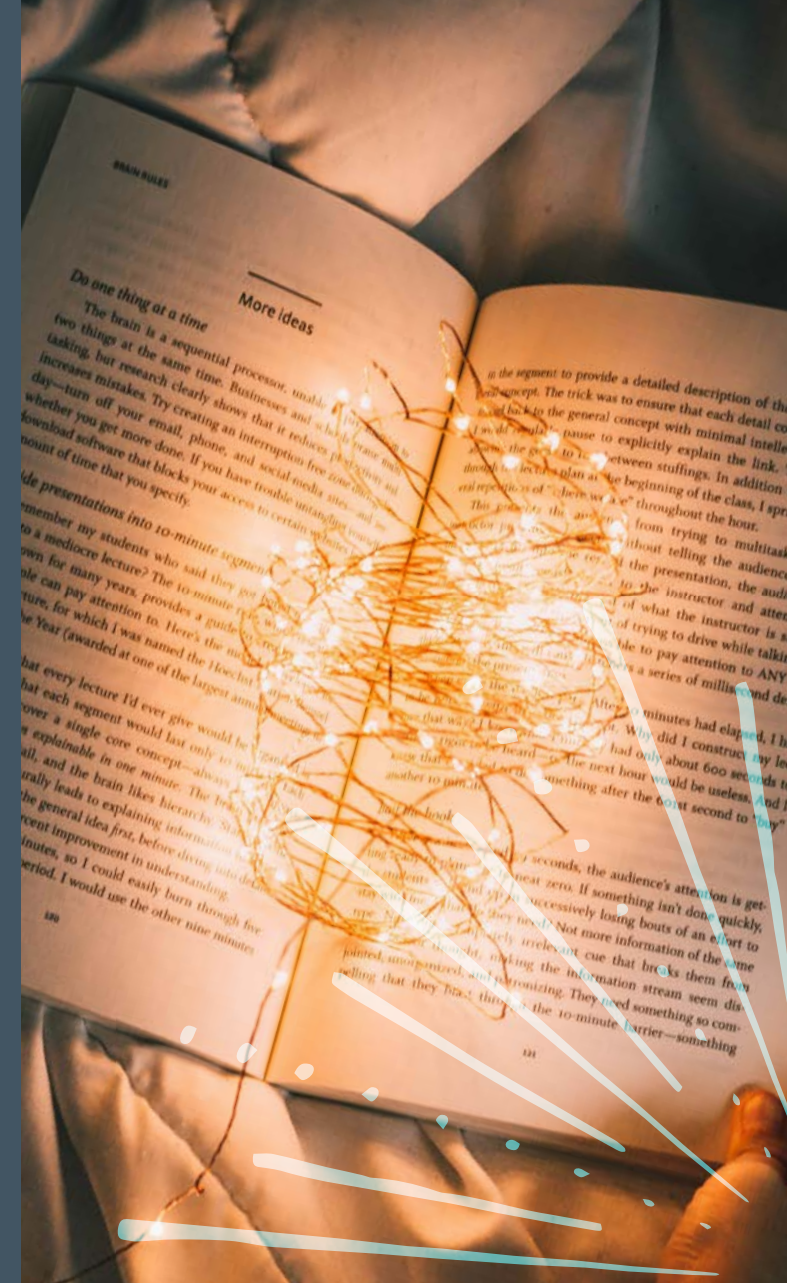
REDUCE YOUR SLEEP

In order to increase our sleep drive, we need to go to sleep only when we are really tired. If you've been suffering with sleep disruption for a while, force yourself to stay up late (around midnight) and set an alarm to wake up at 6 a.m. This will help reset your circadian rhythms so you can focus on quality not quantity of sleep. This includes avoiding daytime naps.

Specialist Support

Chat to your clinician and look at Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBTi) programmes.

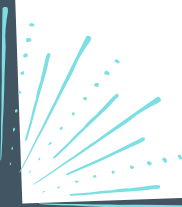
Kathryn Pinkham does a 'Sleep Well During Menopause' course at The Insomnia Clinic, or Sleepstation is available for free, through the NHS.



ANCHORING

The mind loves habits, as running on autopilot helps conserve its energy. Our body clock also likes familiarity, working best when we go to bed and rise the same time, each day.

Set your alarm or notifications on your phone to help you try to stick to this – even at the weekend.



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GET SOME REST IN EVERY DAY

Rest is different from sleep. Rest is important because it calms down our nervous system. Not allowing ourselves regular small breaks makes our mind overheat in the same way a computer might and means we feel wired when we go to bed.

If we want our mind to unwind and stay relaxed throughout the night, then we have to allow ourselves time to switch off during the day. This doesn't mean napping (as this reduces our sleep drive) but instead try taking a gentle walk, listening to a guided meditation, tuning into the breath, reading or doing a state of flow activity which demands full focus, as these can all help us rest.



DYNAMIC RELAXATION

☆ Challenge

One simple and effective method to wind down is to repeatedly tense and relax your muscles, shortly before going to bed. In fact, this is a common technique used in sophrology, which uses gentle and conscious movement to relax the mind. Start with your feet – tense all the muscles in one foot for a few seconds, and then release. Repeat this tensing, holding and relaxing for the rest of the body, right up to your shoulders. The whole challenge should last for about 15 minutes, and should leave you feeling a lot more relaxed, and ready to sleep.



2

CREATE SLEEP ASSOCIATIONS IN THE BEDROOM

Only spend time in the bedroom for sex and sleep. If we bring our work or worries into the bedroom, it can make it difficult for us to switch off and get into the right mindset to relax and drift off to sleep. It

can also cause us to wake up in the night. Sleep specialists even say reading in bed should be avoided.

CONDUCT A BEDROOM AUDIT

Do an audit of your bedroom. Remove any cues from it that may signal an activity other than sleep, so as not to distract or disturb you.

Items to consider removing:

- ✦ Alarm clock
- ✦ Laptop, mobile or other electronic devices
- ✦ Work-related items or documents
- ✦ Exercise-related items
- ✦ Any items that make a noise
- ✦ Any other props you associate with being awake



CREATE A 4-STEP BEDTIME ROUTINE

Something that helps increase sleep association is a series of rituals that are repeated in the same way, before bedtime. This tells the brain it's time to get ready for bed.

Challenge

Get experimental and find four rituals that work for you at bedtime to calm you down and get you ready for slumber. You could write a gratitude journal, take a warm bath, put on a yoga eye pillow or listen to a guided meditation.

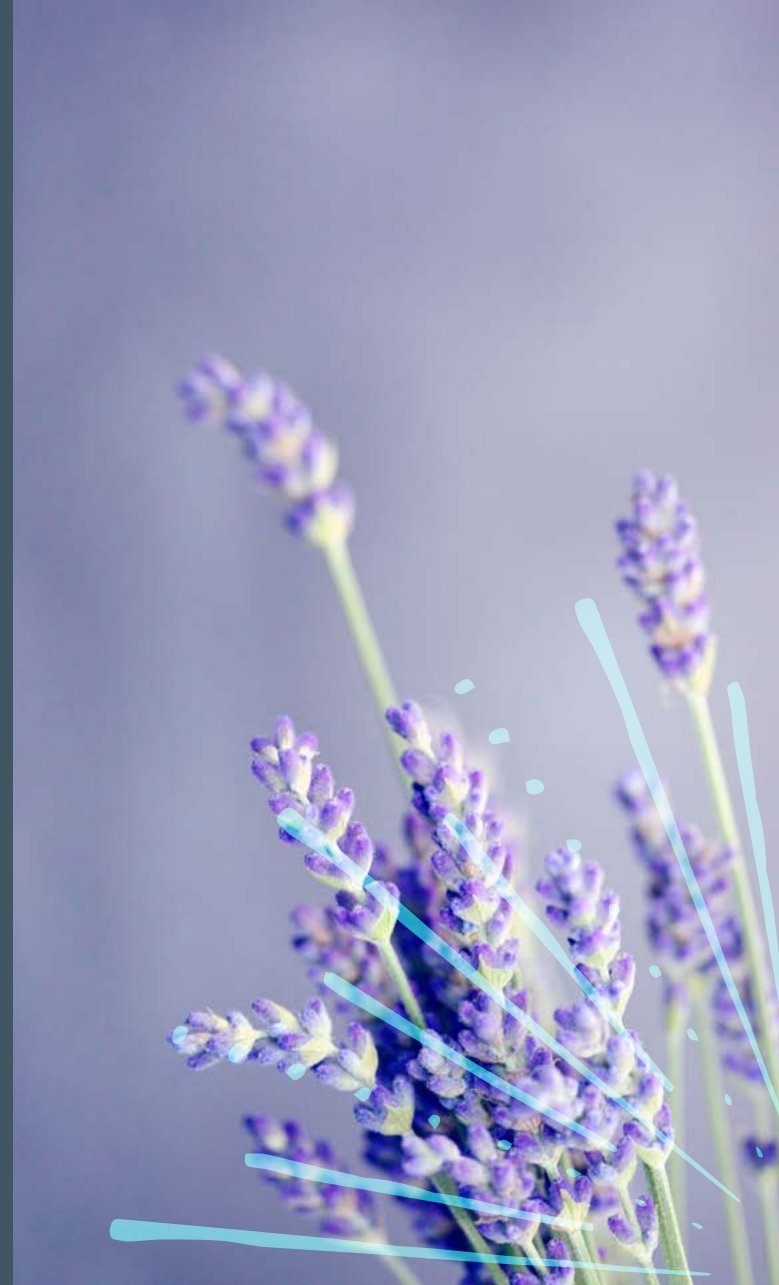


SLEEP-ENHANCING ESSENTIAL OILS

Essential oils have been used through the ages and around the world as a tool to alter our mood. The part of our brain that is associated with smell is placed next to the part that stores memories and regulates our emotions.

Here are some **essential oils associated with boosting sleep** (always use a high-grade, therapeutic oil to notice a benefit):

- ✦ vanilla
- ✦ ylang ylang
- ✦ lavender
- ✦ cedar wood
- ✦ jasmine
- ✦ geranium





3

CREATING THE OPTIMUM ENVIRONMENT

We can help set ourselves up for a good night's sleep by avoiding and preparing for disruptions.

Once we've got ourselves into a calm, sleep-ready state, we want to stay that way.

SURROUND YOURSELF IN DARKNESS

Before bed, you should keep lights dim or off as melatonin – the sleep hormone – is stimulated by a group of receptor cells found in the eye.

Melatonin is a hormone that tells our brain to get ready for sleep. Avoid bright lights when preparing for bed (e.g. when brushing teeth) and 'blue light' from electronic devices, as these disrupt our brain's signal, moving us away from fatigue towards alertness.

If sleeping isn't an issue for you, then do you suffer with waking up too early? Invest in blackout blinds and a good-quality eye mask to avoid waking up early during the summer months.



KEEP COOL

Keeping cool at night becomes particularly important if you experience night sweats or hot flashes.

The problem is that our ability to control our temperature is impaired as we go through perimenopause. This means we can swing from becoming hot one minute to having chills the next.

Preparing for these fluctuations can help:

- ✦ Set your thermostat to 18°C in winter
- ✦ Sleep near an open window in warmer months
- ✦ Invest in cool, natural fibres and layers of bedcovers and sleepwear
- ✦ Invest in a chill mat or pillow
- ✦ Keep flannels in the freezer to use if you wake with intense sweats
- ✦ Avoid heat before bed – drink, bath/shower, hairdryer





4

ADDITIONAL PREPARATIONS

Preparation for a good night's sleep actually starts during the day.

If you use a journal, you'll start to notice how the amount of stress or rest influences the

choices you make around food, alcohol or caffeine, and also how the type or amount of exercise you take affects sleep quality.

POSITIVE PLANNER

If you wake up regularly in the middle of the night worrying about things you have to do the next day, then create a 'Positive Planner'.

Acknowledging these worries a couple of hours before bedtime can **set you up for a better slumber.**

Set aside 15 minutes, a couple of hours before bedtime to write down the answers to the following questions:

- ✦ What did you achieve or get done today?
- ✦ How did you feel about the day?
- ✦ What must you get done tomorrow? (Check it's achievable.)
- ✦ Anything that may get in the way?
- ✦ How will you get these tasks done/overcome any obstacles?



SUPPLEMENTS AND HERBS

Always consult your clinician before taking any supplements or herbs if you are on any medication or have a medical condition.

There are a few supplements that have been shown in clinical trials to improve sleep. **Zinc** may help to reduce the number of wake-ups in the night. As well as being a safe sleep aid, it may have a calming and antidepressant effect.

Magnesium citrate may be helpful for those who have trouble getting off to sleep.

Ashwagandha, valerian and magnolia bark are natural herbal sedatives. To ensure quality and strength, it's better to get blends from a qualified herbalist or functional medicine practitioner than buying them over the counter or online.



INTRODUCE DAILY MOVEMENT AND EXERCISE

Did you know that exercise can help you sleep sounder and longer and feel more awake during the day as it helps relieve stress and improves our mood? We also sleep better when we've been exposed to outdoor light.

However, exercising vigorously within 2–3 hours of bedtime can actually make it harder to fall asleep. Intense exercise right before bed stimulates your heart, brain and muscles – the opposite of what you want at bedtime. It also raises your body temperature and the amount of cortisol, triggering night sweats and increasing stress levels. Try something more restorative, fluid and calming, such as **t'ai chi** or **yin yoga**.



TRY TO STOP SNORING

It's estimated that approximately 15 million Britons snore. Snoring can be linked to serious health conditions and as it can affect the sleep of more than just the sufferer, it can have a negative effect on relationships. But what causes snoring?

During sleep, the muscles controlling our airways can relax, causing the air passage to narrow. As a result, when we breathe, the soft tissues in the mouth, nose and throat vibrate, which we then hear as snoring. Help is at hand though, with a number of over-the-counter remedies available.

Moistening strips can be employed that are designed to reduce the vibration of these soft tissues. Alternatively, mouth guards can prevent the tongue from falling to the back of the mouth. However, such remedies do not guarantee results. If your sleeping and snoring problems are not helped by these remedies, do consult your clinician to rule out more serious conditions.



DON'T MESS WITH YOUR SLEEP CYCLE

A good night's rest is usually an indicator that the body has undergone four specific stages of sleep, which together form one sleep cycle.

At stage one, a person will feel drowsy. Stage two is where someone drops off to sleep. The third stage constitutes deep, slow-wave sleep. The final fourth stage is rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, an indication that we are dreaming.

Sleeping soundly requires that we go through four to six cycles in one night, and anything less will be detrimental to our performance when we wake up. The best way to ensure you have the right mixture of sleep stages is to avoid caffeine and alcohol before sleeping, as they can distort the natural sleep pattern.



SUMMARY

- ✦ Poor sleep is the result of declining and fluctuating hormones and has a huge impact on us physically, emotionally and cognitively
- ✦ Increasing our sleep drive will help improve our sleep quality
- ✦ Strengthening bedroom associations helps signal to the brain it's a space for sleep
- ✦ We often overestimate how long we are awake for – remain calm and know it's usual to wake up several times a night as we move into different states of sleep
- ✦ Use props and tools to help you relax and remain calm before and through the night

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