

6 Tips for the Day After a Bad Night's Sleep

By Robyn Abree, WebMD Feature Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

Rough night last night? Everyone has a bad night of sleep now and then.

Your life won't wait until you're rested, so you'll need all the energy you can to get through today. Some of the nation's leading sleep doctors offer tips on how to power through the day after a bad night's rest.

1. Caffeine, in Moderation

Caffeine can help when you need an energy boost, as long as you don't overdo it, says sleep disorders expert Joyce Walsleben, PhD, of the NYU School of Medicine.

Two cups of coffee, for instance, will give you about as much alertness as you're going to get. Drinking more than that probably won't make you more alert, especially if you drink a lot of caffeinated beverages, says Jeffrey Durmer, MD, chief medical officer at FusionSleep Center in Atlanta.

That's partly about your brain chemistry. When you're sleep deprived, "[sleep hormones] collect in the brain all day and drinking excessive amounts of caffeine isn't going to stop that process," Durmer says. If anything, too much caffeine can give you the jitters, he says.

The same goes for over-the-counter supplements that promise to help you stay alert.

"Caffeine and supplements ... do increase attention and focus and are fine once in awhile, but in no way replace a bad night's sleep," Durmer says. If you use stay-awake supplements regularly, you might need to check with a doctor to see if you have a sleep disorder.

Energy drinks can serve a purpose when used appropriately, but for the most part, usually do more harm than good, says Michael Breus, PhD, who writes WebMD's sleep blog. Breus suggests sticking with plain black or green tea and coffee. Also, steer clear of all caffeine after 4 p.m. to avoid problems falling asleep at night, Breus says.

2. Don't Rely on Sugar

When you're sleep deprived, you may be tempted to reach for a candy bar. Don't.

Sugar will give you quick energy. It doesn't last, though, and you'll just end up crashing later, Breus says.

Instead, stick to a balanced diet and put extra emphasis on protein-rich foods like nuts and lean meats, he says. Also, avoid large meals and simple carbohydrates, like having pasta for lunch, to avoid energy dips.

Breus suggests eating a salad with grilled chicken, or another lean protein, like fish with veggies for lunch and dinner.

For breakfast, Durmer suggests eating protein-rich foods like eggs and plain Greek yogurt. If you have a sweet tooth, choose fruit, not a doughnut. The natural sugar in fruit takes longer to digest than table sugar and won't make your blood sugar swing as much, Durmer says.

3. Take Breaks

After a bad night's sleep, your attention span may drag a little more than usual. To keep focused, take breaks throughout the day, Durmer says.

- **Go for a walk outdoors.** You'll get sunlight along with activity. "Movement stimulates alertness in the brain, and sunlight provides your body with natural cues to promote wakefulness," Durmer says.
- **When you exercise, take it easy.** Keep it light or moderate, not vigorous, when you're exhausted. You're much more likely to get injured if you do hard exercise when you're fatigued, Walsleben says.

- **Take a brief nap, if you have time.** Napping up to 25 minutes will help recharge your body and mind, Breus says. Napping longer than that will make you drowsier than you already are. For a supercharged nap, Breus suggests a "nap-a-latte." Drink a cup of iced drip coffee as fast as you can then take a 25-minute nap and you'll be good to go "for at least four hours," he says. That way you'll reap all the benefits of a short nap, but wake up just in time for the caffeine to kick in.

4. Simplify Your Day

Let's face it, you're not at your best when you don't sleep well. So lighten your work load as much as possible. By doing fewer things, you can still do a quality job without stressing out, Durmer says.

Let's say you have five tasks for the day. Shave them down to two or three, and focus on doing those really well, Durmer says.

You may also want to hold off on making any big decisions until after you've rested, Breus says.

5. Avoid Driving

Drowsy driving is dangerous, since it can lead to accidents. Stay off the road as much as possible if you haven't slept.

If you absolutely can't carpool or take transit, power nap before driving, Walsleben says. When driving, don't wear your sunglasses since sunlight may make you feel more energetic, Durmer says. That won't undo your tiredness, so you should still avoid driving, for safety's sake.

Be particularly careful when driving in the early afternoon. "Most people naturally drift around 1 or 2 p.m., and those who are sleep deprived will take a bigger hit," Walsleben says.

6. Sleep in, a Little, Tonight

When you go to bed tonight, you might be tempted to sleep longer than normal. Moderation, again, is the key here.

Sleeping in after a bad night's sleep is OK, but you're trying to get your sleep schedule back on track. Sleeping in too long can make that harder, because it shifts your normal sleep pattern.

If you sleep in, limit it to no more than two extra hours, Durmer says. If you normally get seven hours of sleep at night, aim for nine.

Going to bed too early can also disturb sleep patterns, says Walsleben. If you're exhausted and want to hit the sack, try to wait until it's about an hour before normal bedtime.

No matter how tired you feel, there's no reason to sleep all day, since the most recovery sleep time you can get is 10 hours, Durmer says.

If you're exhausted but still having trouble falling asleep, count backwards from 300 in multiples of three, Breus says. Doing math problems makes it hard to think about anything else and keep your eyes open, he says.

SOURCES:

Joyce Walsleben, PhD, research associate professor, New York School of Medicine; former director, NYU Medicine's sleep disorder center.

Jeffrey Durmer, MD, PhD, co-founder and chief medical officer, FusionHealth, Atlanta.

Michael J. Breus, PhD, author, *Good Night: The Sleep Doctor's 4-Week Program to Better Sleep and Better Health*.

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