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4 Love lavender

Studies show lavender can ease anxiety, promote relaxation and calm the nervous system to get you to the land of nod.

*** SPRAY IT** Inhaling lavender releases sleep-promoting neurochemicals in the brain so try spritzing your pulse points with a lavender-rich spray. **Aroma Therapeutics Sleep Enhancer Spray Concentrate, 50ml, £26.65**, from aroma.co.uk contains lavender and also sleep-inducing ylang ylang and sandalwood.

*** TASTE IT** Now you can eat lavender. **RelaxMe (£20 for**

120g jar, from health food stores)

is a honey made from bees fed on a special diet of lavender, passionflower and agnus castus. Suck a couple of spoonfuls a day.

*** WEAR IT** Make the most of the 60 acupuncture points located on the soles of your feet by applying lavender foot patches overnight. **Bodytox Lavender Sleep Patches, £23.99 for 14**, from victoriahealth.com



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Get a good NIGHT'S SLEEP

New research says sleep deprivation hits women hardest. And not enough sleep increases the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and depression. Try 10 new ways to get some serious shut-eye...



1 Eat breakfast

Eating first thing will help you sleep later. Make sure you fuel yourself within half-an-hour of getting up. It increases the production of neurotransmitters which in turn enhance levels of sleep hormones, serotonin and melatonin – so you feel better and sleep better. Says Dr Nicola Formisano, a sleep coach at London's Capri Nightingale Hospital: 'Sleeping breakfast on waking less after rising also changes the body's biochemistry, leading to over-reliance on adrenaline-like chemicals such as cortisol – a common sleep-winner.'

2 Try tai chi

A 2007 study has found that the gentle exercise tai chi may improve sleep. Researchers have discovered that people who practised it modestly (20-30 mins) on an average, every 10 minutes longer. To find a class, go to taiichionline.com

3 Take a (herbal) pill

Hormonal imbalances from stress, menstrual fluctuations and menopause can cause excessive production of cortisol that can lead to sleep deprivation. It happens because cortisol blocks serotonin, which at night is converted to melatonin, your pineal gland's 'happy' hormone. Magnolia thiodiols, coumarins, which contain extracts of magnolia, thus help reduce cortisol levels while thiodiols enhance serotonin synthesis. It also contains flavonoids which help increase the brain's melatonin-producing 'happy waves', he says.

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5 Roll your back

Before hitting the sack, try this five-minute technique from hypnotherapist Marina Free (www.marinafree.com). It puts your body into alpha waves state, the dreamy state before deep sleep.

6 Give yourself some pressure

Like acupuncture, acupressure stimulates points on the body to aid sleep. One without the needles. 'Find the spot on your arm three finger-widths from your wrist crease in the fleshy part between your tendons,' suggests acupressure therapist Tracy Wilkinson. 'Then using your thumb, press the circular, circular motion before bedtime.'

7 Cherry pick

Melatonin is a hormone that helps regulate sleep but while babies naturally produce lots of it, as we age our melatonin production slows down. However, your diet can help. 'Walnuts and tart cherries are rich in melatonin,' says Dr James E. Barger, director of the Northumbria Centre for Sleep Research. Also try foods containing tryptophan, which helps to stimulate the production of melatonin. These include eggs, cereal, bananas, turkey and milk. *** GIVE IT** Try **CherryLette Concentrated Montmorency Cherry Juice, £14.49 for 475ml** (10 servings), from health food stores.

8 And breathe...

Stress doesn't have to be a sleep saboteur. 'Focused breathing eases your mind, clearing thoughts and worrying about your to-do list,' says Cheryl Hawk, clinical psychologist and author of *Life Happens* (Aurum, £4.44). Try her technique: lie on a towel and close your eyes. Breathe in silently, counting 1, 2, 3, 4, and then breathe out counting 1, 2, 3, 4. Repeat five times without breaking the breath.

9 Don't worry, be happy

Some old wives' tales running through your head? 'If all you have five or six dreams that replay in your mind,' explains Dr Hamidkhan, who's also author of *1700 Best Sleep Solutions* (Piat, £14.99). 'The key is to become aware of your top five. Ignore them and when they come up in the night, just observe that you're hearing that particular thought again.' It's called mindfulness. 'When you just notice the thought as opposed to something yourself in them and becoming overwhelmed and panicky, they start to lose their power over you.'

Looking after your health

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10 Have sex!

Yes, you did that right. Sex makes you feel good because of the hormone oxytocin and serotonin, which are released during orgasm. Don't let the opportunity pass. Try to have sex early on.



3 Take a (herbal) pill

Hormonal imbalance from stress, monthly fluctuations and menopause can cause excessive production of cortisol that can lead to sleep deprivation. 'It happens because cortisol blocks serotonin, which at night is converted to melatonin,' says pharmacist Shabir Daya. He recommends the herbal remedy, Magnolia Rhodiola Complex, which contains extracts of magnolia, that helps reduce excess cortisol, while rhodiola enhances serotonin uptake. 'It also contains theanine which helps increase the brain's mind-relaxing alpha waves,' he says.

NHS Labs Magnolia Rhodiola Complex, £26 for 60 capsules, is available from victoriahealth.com

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5 Roll your eyes

Before hitting the sack, try this eye-rolling technique from hypnotherapist Marisa Peer (marisapeer.com). It puts your brain into alpha wave mode, the drowsy state before deep sleep.

- 1** Lie back, feet and hands slightly apart. Roll up your eyes as if you're trying to look into your eyebrows or hairline.
- 2** Stare at a real or imagined spot while taking three deep breaths.
- 3** On the third breath, keep your eyeballs up while closing your eyelids. Your eyelids will flutter. This is REM, the state you are in when you're dreaming.
- 4** Let your chin drop and relax.

6 Give yourself some pressure

Like acupuncture, acupressure stimulates points on the body to aid sleep (but without the needles!). 'Find the spot on your arm three finger-widths from your wrist crease in the fleshy area between your tendons,' suggests acupressure therapist Tracey Wilkinson. 'Then using your thumb, press in a circular clockwise motion before bedtime.'

*** NAIL IT** The Yantra Mat, an acupressure mat, has spiked flowers to help you work on specific acupressure points. **£39.90, from Holland & Barrett.**



8 And breathe...

Stress doesn't have to be a sleep saboteur. 'Focused breathing stops your mind chasing thoughts and worrying about your to-do list,' says Cheryl Rezek, clinical psychologist and author of *Life Happens* (Amazon, £14.44). Try her technique:

- * Sit in a chair and close your eyes. Breathe in silently, counting 1, 2, 3, 4 and then breathe out counting 1, 2, 3, 4. Repeat five times without forcing the breath.**
- * Now breathe in and out for the same length of time as before, counting 1, 2. Repeat five times.**
- * Breathe in and out without counting.**

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Melatonin is a hormone that helps regulate sleep, but while babies naturally produce lots of it, as we age our melatonin production slows down. However, your diet can help. 'Walnuts and tart cherries are rich in melatonin,' says Dr Jason Ellis, director of the Northumbria Centre for Sleep Research. 'Also try foods containing tryptophan, which helps to stimulate the production of melatonin. These include eggs, cereal, bananas, turkey and milk.'

*** DRINK IT** Try **CherryActive Concentrated Montmorency Cherry Juice, £14.49 for 473ml (15 servings), from health food stores.**



9 Don't worry, be happy

Same old worries running through your head? 'We all have five or six themes that replay in our minds,' explains Dr Ramlakhan, who's also author of *Tired But Wired* (Souvenir Press Ltd, £12.99).

'The key is to become aware of your top five. Name them and when they come up in the night just observe that you're having that particular thought again.' It's called mindfulness. 'When you just notice the thoughts as opposed to immersing yourself in them and becoming overwhelmed and panicky, they start to lose their power over you.'

10 Have sex!

Yes, you read that right. Sex makes you feel sleepy because of the hormones oxytocin and serotonin, which are released during orgasm. Time to have an early night...