

SLEEP MYTHS

Wake Up to the Truth About Sleep Myths

Never wake a sleepwalker because the shock could kill them! That's a myth – waking a sleepwalker might surprise them, but it's not going to kill anyone. There are lots of myths about sleep, as well as about mattresses that have many of us tossing and turning. The Better Sleep Council can help you separate fact from fiction.

Sleep is something that can seem mysterious to us. After all, we're not awake while we're doing it and we don't remember it, so it's natural to be a little confused about some of the facts on sleep. The truth about sleep can help you make good choices that will have you sleeping well enough and long enough to feel great. Here are some common myths, debunked:

- **Saturday sleep-in.** Some people think they can catch up on their sleep over the weekend. You can't ever completely make up for sleep you've lost or bank sleep for the future, so it's best to plan for 7 to 8 hours each night.
- **Ageing out of sleep.** A common belief is that older people need less sleep. While older people tend to wake more at night, they still need the same total hours of sleep as anyone else.
- **Drink to dream.** Alcohol does make a person feel sleepy, so many assume drinking before bed can help you sleep. In fact, alcohol is metabolized throughout the night and is likely to disturb your sleep, especially since it reduces rapid eye movement (or REM sleep), so it's best not to drink it before bed.
- **Two of a kind.** Some people believe that you can save money on your bed by replacing only the mattress and keeping the old box spring. You should always replace both since they are designed to work best together as a set, and the warranty may not apply if you do not.
- **Sheep are not for shut-eye.** Counting sheep is a popular suggestion to help you fall asleep. An [Oxford University study](#) showed doing this actually lengthens how long it takes to sleep. Instead, listen to soothing music or read a book to help you fall asleep.
- **Firm it up.** It's a common myth that if you have back pain you should only buy a firm mattress. The fact is that mattress choice is a very personal thing and what feels good to one person may not for another. Try out a variety of mattresses to see what seems most comfortable for you.
- **Tripped out on tryptophan.** At every Thanksgiving you are sure to hear someone say that the turkey is making them sleepy. Turkey does contain tryptophan which can cause sleepiness, but it doesn't have more than any other meat and is not the cause of the yawns at the table. Instead, the heavy meal, change in weather, hard work of putting together such a feast and interacting with so many people is likely to blame.
- **Cheesy.** Some people are convinced that eating cheese before bed causes nightmares. There is no evidence to support this idea. In general though, it's a good idea to finish meals or snacks two to three hours before you go to bed if you want to sleep well.
- **Milky Way.** Another common myth is that a glass of warm milk before bed will make you sleepy. While there's no evidence to support this story, you might find it comforting if it was something that was always given to you as a child.



Say what? More common myths about sleep.

A 2017 study from the Better Sleep Council found that many Americans still believe these sleep myths.

- 164 million American adults (66%) believe mattresses last about 10 years before you need a replacement. As a general rule, after seven years it's time to evaluate your current mattress and decide if it's time for a new one.
- American adults (43%) believe that a person can catch up on lost sleep over the weekend. In reality – you just can't bank sleep.
- 151 million American adults (61%) believe that the best mattress for a sore back is one that is very firm. Mattresses are a personal choice, and while in general a firm mattress is often recommended, the mattress that will alleviate back issues for one person may not be the same for another. And one person's criteria for "firm" can be very different from another's.
- About 122 million American adults believe it's illegal to remove mattress tags. Truth be told, it's fine for consumers to take off the tag after purchase – there are no mattress police. Men (53%) were more likely to believe this compared to women (45%).
- Around 122 million Americans believe some people don't dream. Everyone has dreams, even if you can't recall them. Again, men (52%) were more likely to believe this than women (46%).

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