

SIX MAIN EXTERNAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT YOUR SLEEP

There are six external factors that can interfere with your sleep quality and quantity. You can usually control those factors to promote better sleep.

LIGHT TEMPERATURE

Spending time in front of the screen light in the evening affects the release of melatonin (a hormone that signals to the brain that it's time to transition toward sleep). The brain gets fooled by the light into thinking that it's still daytime and slows down gradual melatonin production. When you finally shut down your computer or other electronic device and go to bed, you might not be ready to go to sleep because your body didn't get the memo yet. It might take another hour or longer in the dark for melatonin to reach sleep-ready levels. If you have trouble falling asleep, try to stay away from screens for at least an hour before bed and in the course of that hour avoid bright lights of all kinds.

With dusk usually comes a drop in temperature, and your brain is attuned to detecting that. This is another factor that controls the release of melatonin. This is why it is usually easier to fall asleep in a cooler room than the hot one. If you have trouble falling asleep, you might want to consider turning your temperature down a bit (if you are using air conditioning) or opening a window to get some cooler air in. Be mindful of the kind of bedding you use so that it keeps you warm enough to be comfortable, but not so warm that you get sweaty.

CAFFEINE

Caffeine artificially mutes the effect of adenosine – a chemical that gradually builds up in the brain in the course of the day, creating “sleep pressure” in the evening that makes you fall asleep. It can take 5-7 hours to overcome a single dose of caffeine and succumb to “sleep pressure.”

If you have trouble falling asleep, try to stay away from caffeine for at least five hours before bedtime.



ALCOHOL

Alcohol sedates you, but it does not induce natural sleep. As a result of this “alcohol sedation” the sleep often becomes fragmented, which means you get less rest. Even if you don't notice those brief awakenings, you will feel their impact in the morning. Alcohol also robs you of dream sleep. To avoid “alcohol sedation” you can either limit your intake of alcohol, or have your drink earlier in the day.

ALARM EXERCISING BEFORE BED

The alarm is startling to your heart. And if you continue to hit the snooze button repeatedly, you will subject your heart to that shock over and over again.

The best solution is to let yourself wake up naturally (which often isn't realistic). To minimize the stress that the alarm places on your heart, you can try other types of alarm. For example, there are alarms that wake you up by slowly turning on the light to imitate sunrise. Something like that would be much more kind to your heart.

Exercise raises core body temperature which can remain high for an hour or two after physical exertion. It also increases your metabolic rate. If you exercise too close to bedtime, it can be difficult to drop your core temperature sufficiently to fall asleep. This is why it is best to exercise at least 3 hours before bed (including asana practice). If you choose to do a movement practice close to bedtime, keep active movements to a minimum with more emphasis on breath work and meditation.