# The Perfect Sleep Environment

An increasing amount of detailed sleep studies and accessible information means that we’re becoming more and more aware of the importance of sleep. People are now making sleep a priority, with a strong understanding of why a perfect bedtime routine, exercise, relaxation and healthy food are so beneficial.

Scientific breakthroughs have benefited us all in the sleep department, but at the same time, we’ve been hindered. We’re in an age of the internet, smartphones and non-stop high-pressure jobs, which means most of us are partaking in activities that have a negative effect on our sleep.

In order to enjoy a restful night’s sleep, you must pay some attention to your environment. Here are the top six things that should be considered.

### **TEMPERATURE**

Hot, cold and draughty rooms can seriously impact on your sleep. Your body heat peaks in the evening and then drops to its lowest levels when you’re asleep, so a cool 16-18°C (60-65°F) is thought to be an ideal temperature in a bedroom. Temperatures over 24°C (71°F) are likely to cause restlessness, while a cold room of about 12°C (53°F) will make it difficult to drop off.

Young children and elderly people may require a slightly warmer environment, so it’s useful to invest in a room thermometer to keep track of temperatures. It’s also worth purchasing a range of suitable bedding depending on the season – an extra layer of sheets or blankets will make you more comfortable when it’s cold, as will a hot water bottle or a good pair of bed socks for cold feet.

If possible, have windows open to maximise cool air circulation in the hot months. Of course, safety comes first, so keep downstairs window shut and only open upstairs windows on a locked setting.

### **LIGHTING**

Have you ever wondered why darkness is best for sleep? When we see light, our bodies assume it’s time to wake up. When it’s dark, we release melatonin, which relaxes the body and helps us to drift off. It’s no surprise that many more of us struggle to adjust to a new sleeping pattern during British Summer Time!

There’s nothing worse than being rudely awoken by the early morning sun, so try blackout blinds or an eye mask. If you like to read in bed, buy a dimmer light. You can also purchase alarm clocks with handy light settings, which dim slowly to help you drift off, and then brighten to wake you gradually in the morning. The biggest no-no is mobile phones and computer screens; these LED displays glow with blue light, which suppresses melatonin even more.

### **COMFORT**

Your bed is by far the most significant element of a good night’s rest. It is near impossible to get a deep, effective sleep on an old, uncomfortable bed. Mattresses lacking comfort, space and support are likely to leave you waking tired and achy, and will also have a significant impact on your partner’s sleep, too.

Everyone is made differently, which is why different beds suit different bodies. You should select the best mattress for you, offering the correct support and comfort for your weight and build, and if someone else is going to be sharing the bed, spend extra time finding a bed that’s mutually comfortable. When we’re asleep it’s recommended that we maintain a good posture; a mattress too soft will cause us to slouch, while one that’s too firm can apply pressure to our hips and shoulders. For more information on how to choose a bed visit the [National Bed Federation](https://www.bedfed.org.uk/consumer/).

### **GADGETS & GIZMOS**

Bedrooms are a place for rest, relaxation and intimacy. Unfortunately, many of us consider our bedrooms as extensions of our living rooms and studies, and so introduce digital distractions into the mix. While there’s nothing wrong with watching a film, playing games or answering emails, these tasks should not be completed in bed.

Your bedroom is your sanctuary – a calm, relaxed space that has no requirement for technological toys. TVs, computers, phones and tablets [prevent us from falling asleep](https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-hub/sleep-matters/blue-light-and-sleep/), and can also be disruptive throughout the night. Beeps, buzzes and even the tiniest standby lights can wreak havoc with the body’s [circadian rhythm](https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-hub/sleep-matters/circadian-rhythms/), so make sure everything is switched off at the mains or, even better, banned completely!

### **NOISE**

It goes without saying that loud, sudden or repetitive noises can interrupt sleep. One of the best ways to combat this is with double glazing, as it muffles sounds from outside. You can also use foam ear plugs, which are particularly effective in the warmer months when you may leave a window open.

While certain noises cause interrupted sleep, soft, steady sounds can be soothing. Some people have found that ‘white noise’ tapes help them fall asleep and sleep more soundly, others prefer the low familiar tones (much like Wayne Rooney, who favours the sound of a vacuum cleaner or hairdryer to help him drift off!)

### **RELAXATION**

The final step in creating a perfect sleeping environment is to make it relaxing. The bedroom should be an oasis of calm and tranquility – uncluttered and devoted to the land of dreams. And a relaxation routine plays an important part in this.

There are many ways you can relax before bed. Try running  a warm bubble bath around an hour before bedtime, which will help you to wind down and gently raise your temperature, thus triggering the sleep mechanism. Scents such as lavender and geranium are naturally calming, so invest in some essential oils to help you drift off. Remember, these should not be used in pregnancy or children’s rooms.

Wind down with warm, milky drinks and herbal teas, which are a good alternative to a late night caffeinated cuppa or alcohol, and swap late night texting or social media scrolling for a good book. Spending half an hour reading is much more beneficial to your sleep, as bright screens are counterproductive to your sleep cycle. You could also play some soft, soothing music and practice yoga or breathing techniques. All of these activities will put you in the right frame of mind for sleeping.