

# Bedroom Makeover: Create a Sleep Sanctuary

The quality of your sleep depends so much on the quality of your sleep environment.

## Outfit your bed for maximum snooze potential

**Crawling into bed each evening should be a pleasure.** Your sheets and blankets should suit your needs in terms of texture and temperature. Your pillows should support your head and neck and encourage a comfortable night's sleep.

- Experiment with your pillow alternatives. Firmness and filler can vary. Synthetic-fibre pillows may harbour more allergy-triggering fungal spores than feather-filled ones. A plastic cover between pillow and pillowcase would minimize exposure to allergens and dust mites.
- Test out linen choices. For some people, flannel feels cozy, but it can induce an itch-fest in others. Also, what keeps you comfy in the cold months may have you sweating come spring.
- Measure your mattress options. Even if you're not as picky as the girl in "The Princess and the Pea," an older, poorly structured mattress can cause tossing and turning. A mattress that's too firm may not support the body evenly, and one that's too soft could find you sinking in too deep. Either way, you could have a tougher time falling asleep and wake up with aches and pains. Take your time when shopping for a new mattress. Wear comfy, loose-fitting clothing so you can hop on and try out many models.

## Save your bedroom for sleeping

**Save your bedroom for sleeping.** Sounds obvious, right? But think about how many things can end up in the bedroom that have nothing to do with sleep: television, computer, books, work papers, pets, exercise equipment, food. Plus there are parents out there who struggle with kids coming into their beds after a nightmare. The bedroom should be a sanctuary for slumber.

- Clear your bedroom of things that might distract you from a calm, relaxed, sleep-ready state of mind.
- Keep the door shut so dogs or cats can't hop under the covers with you uninvited.
- Encourage children's consistent sleeping patterns. If a child insists on coming into the room repeatedly, it's probably a sign that something's amiss in their routine.
- Decorate your bedroom with serene accessories, things that calm your eyes and your mind. That could mean the spare-and-bare approach for some people or the cozy-tucked-in look for others. Consider the colour of paint you choose for your bedroom walls. An alarming yellow or orange may still glow bright into the night.

## Don't be afraid of the dark

**To get to sleep, our bodies need darkness.** Light – or the lack of it – regulates our sleep patterns and winds our internal biological clock. The presence of light cues our bodies to rise and shine, while the lack of light lulls us to sleep. When darkness falls, the retina of the eye sends signals to the brain to release the sleep-initiating hormone *melatonin*. The bright light that helps keep you awake during the day can disturb your sleep at night. When planning your bedroom's lighting layout, allow for the option of darkness:

- Hang curtains, drapes, or retractable blinds to block out street light or the glow of a full moon.

- Turn off all lights in the hallway or bathroom. If you must get out of bed to visit the bathroom, light your path with a low-illumination nightlight that won't interrupt your sleepy state.
- Stash an eye mask in the drawer of your bedside table for especially bright nights.
- Stow away out of sight your recharging cell phone, your blinking laptop, your alarm clock, and any other techno-gadget that glows or emits blue LED light. When light is low, the eye becomes especially sensitive to colours at the blue end of the spectrum. For people sensitive to this light, it can affect their sleep.

## Strive for a "sound" sleep-scape

**The relationship between sleep and noise is individual.** Some sleepers require silent nights, while others are more accustomed to the humming, thrumming sounds of the city. If buses rumble down your street through the wee hours, a quiet night in the country could mean for a fitful sleep. Noise is all about what you're used to.

- Pipe in some white noise to cover up sounds. The static buzz of white noise – which is kind of like the sound of a waterfall or of air releasing from a balloon – cancels out other noises and helps to lull some people into a relaxed state. You can achieve the fuzz factor of white noise with an oscillating fan or a sound machine designed specifically for the goal of a good night's rest.
- Plug your ears with earplugs to block out sounds. Specially-created "sleep-phones" are available, too, which are soft headphones that transmit gentle music or meditative words to ease a body and mind into sleep.
- If someone in your family has a particularly tough time falling and staying asleep, consider where their bedroom is situated in the house. Are they in a high-noise, high-traffic area, too near the kitchen, the laundry room, a noisy street, or an opening-and-closing garage door? You may need to shuffle sleep locations!

## Set the temperature before you turn in

**The micro-climate of your bedroom can affect how easily and deeply you fall asleep.** A room that's too hot can mean more midnight wake-ups and lighter sleep overall. A room that's too cold, though, could keep you too alert. While there's no perfect temperature for the perfect sleep and each person will have a different sense of the ideal temperature, it's thought that a slightly cool room is more conducive to a good night's sleep. Somewhere in the range of 16°C to 19°C (60°F to 67°F) is best. Some tips:

- Moisten dry air with a humidifier.
- Cool and circulate air with an oscillating or ceiling fan.
- Opt for seasonally appropriate sheets and bed linens. Remove duvet covers as the temperatures rise outside.

## How sleep-friendly is your bedroom?

Kept awake at night, your mind may wander to the book sitting on the bedside table, your laptop flashing from across the room, that letter you need to send. And your eyes may spy the flickering lights from your computer or the hovering streetlamp outside your window. Your ears may detect the noise from distant clattering trains or the humming of the refrigerator. You might toss and turn on a creaky old mattress, flip and fluff your pillow, thrash the sheets around your ankles, or kick off the comforter.

The quality of your sleep depends so much on the quality of your sleep environment. Unless they're just dog-tired or they've stayed up way past their bedtime, some people can find it tough to fall asleep in some bedrooms.

How sleep-friendly is your bedroom? Does your boudoir need a bedtime makeover?

Use your senses to scan your bedroom for a few sleep-friendly factors:

- Look around your room: Do you see a television? Do you see a laptop computer or other office equipment? Piles of paperwork?
- Turn off the lights in your bedroom. Now count how many tiny flickers of light still shine. If you lost count after your cell phone, your laptop, the lights from the television, the DVD player, the alarm clock, the streetlamp outside, and your iPod dock, your bedroom isn't very sleep-friendly.
- Close your eyes and listen to the sounds of your room. How many different distinctive sounds can you detect? Do you hear the washer and dryer tumbling or the subway rumbling? Is there street noise?
- Take a moment to feel the air in the room. Is it stuffy? Overly hot? Too chilly? Just right?
- As you tuck in, think about the comfort level of your bed itself. Is the mattress meeting your needs? Are your sheets and blankets appropriate for the season?

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