

SARAH HARTLEY | LIFE AFTER 50

7 THINGS THAT MAY BE RUINING YOUR SLEEP AFTER 50

A simple, practical guide to the everyday habits and sleep problems
worth checking

A CALM PLACE TO START

If your sleep has changed, you do not have to change everything at once.
Start with one small thing, notice what happens, and build from there.

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WELCOME

If your sleep is not what it used to be, you are not alone.

Many people notice changes in their sleep after 50. You may wake earlier than you used to. You may wake several times during the night. Or you may lie awake wondering why you are suddenly having trouble sleeping.

Getting older can change sleep. But poor sleep is not something you simply have to accept.

There are many things worth checking.

This short guide looks at seven of them.

You do not need to change everything at once. In fact, I would suggest that you do not.

Instead, use this guide to spot one or two things that may be affecting your sleep and try a simple change.

One important note: I am not a doctor or health professional. Sarah Hartley is a fictional, AI-generated persona created to share practical, research-based information for adults over 50.

This guide is for education only. It is not medical advice and does not diagnose or treat any condition.

FIRST: SLEEP CHANGES AFTER 50

Sleep can change as we get older.

You may spend less time in deep sleep. You may wake more easily from noise, light, temperature or other disturbances.

You may also find yourself waking earlier.

These changes can be normal.

But there is an important difference between normal changes and ongoing sleep problems.

If you regularly struggle to fall asleep, stay asleep or feel rested during the day, it is worth paying attention.

The National Institute on Aging recommends regular sleep and wake times, regular activity, avoiding late naps, and avoiding caffeine and alcohol late in the day.

The good news is that many sleep habits can be changed.

The key is not to chase a perfect night's sleep.

Start by finding out what may be getting in the way.

1. YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE MAY BE TOO IRREGULAR

One of the easiest things to overlook is your wake-up time.

If you get up at 6:30 on Monday, 8:30 on Tuesday and 10:00 on Saturday, your body has to keep adjusting to a changing schedule.

This can happen easily after retirement.

You no longer have to get up for work, so bedtime and wake-up time can slowly drift.

Research increasingly suggests that regular sleep timing matters. A systematic review found that greater variation in sleep timing was associated with several poorer health outcomes, although this research does not prove that an irregular schedule causes those problems.

The National Institute on Aging recommends going to bed and getting up at about the same time each day.

TRY THIS:

Choose a realistic wake-up time.

Keep it roughly the same every day for the next week.

You do not need to be perfect.

The goal is simply to give your body a more reliable rhythm.

TRY THIS TOMORROW:

Write down the time you get out of bed.

Do the same for the next seven days.

You may be surprised by how much your schedule changes.

2. YOU MAY NOT BE GETTING ENOUGH DAYTIME LIGHT OR MOVEMENT

Better sleep is not only about what you do at night.

What you do during the day matters too.

Your body uses light to help keep its internal clock on track. Regular physical activity is also linked with better sleep in older adults.

A number of systematic reviews have found that exercise can improve sleep quality in older adults.

You do not need an intense workout.

A walk outside can be a good place to start.

Getting outside during the day also gives you natural light.

TRY THIS:

Get outside during the day.

Take a walk if you are able.

Spend some time in natural daylight.

Keep moving in ways that are safe and comfortable for you.

You do not have to become a fitness expert to become more active.

TRY THIS TOMORROW:

After breakfast, go outside for a short walk or simply spend some time outdoors.

Then notice how you feel that evening.

IMPORTANT:

If you have a health condition or have been advised to limit exercise, follow your healthcare professional's advice.

3. YOUR AFTERNOON COFFEE MAY STILL BE AFFECTING YOUR SLEEP

Coffee can feel harmless.

But caffeine can stay in the body for several hours.

A 2023 systematic review and meta-analysis looked at 24 studies and found that caffeine reduced total sleep time and sleep efficiency and increased the time people spent awake after going to sleep.

The researchers estimated that a typical cup of coffee containing about 107 mg of caffeine would need to be consumed about 9 hours before bedtime to avoid reducing total sleep time.

That does NOT mean everyone needs to stop drinking coffee at breakfast.

People respond differently.

But it does show that caffeine later in the day can matter more than you might expect.

And coffee is not the only source.

Tea, chocolate, cola and some other products can contain caffeine too.

TRY THIS:

For one week, move your last caffeinated drink earlier.

Then see whether anything changes.

TRY THIS TONIGHT:

Check what time you had your last caffeine today.

Write it down.

4. THAT EVENING DRINK MAY NOT BE HELPING YOUR SLEEP

Alcohol can make you feel sleepy.

That can make it seem like it helps you sleep.

But falling asleep more quickly is not the same as having a better night's sleep.

Research shows that alcohol can change normal sleep patterns, including REM sleep.

The National Institute on Aging recommends avoiding alcohol as part of healthy sleep habits.

This does not mean that one drink guarantees a bad night.

It means alcohol is worth testing if your sleep is not as good as you would like.

TRY THIS:

If you normally have an evening drink, notice what happens to your sleep on nights when you do not.

Do not try to guess.

Look at your own pattern.

TRY THIS TONIGHT:

If you drink alcohol in the evening, make a note of:

WHAT you drank.

WHEN you drank it.

HOW you slept.

HOW you felt the next morning.

You are looking for a pattern, not a perfect answer.

5. YOUR NAP MIGHT NOT BE THE ENEMY

Napping gets blamed for a lot of poor sleep.

But the research is more complicated than that.

A systematic review of 15 studies involving older adults found little evidence that daytime napping was automatically harmful to nighttime sleep.

Naps can also reduce feelings of sleepiness and tiredness.

So this is not a simple rule:

"Never nap."

The more useful question is:

"Does my nap seem to help me, or does it make nighttime sleep harder?"

Late afternoon and evening naps are more likely to interfere with nighttime sleep, which is why the National Institute on Aging advises avoiding them.

TRY THIS:

If you nap, write down:

What time you napped.

How long you slept.

How you slept that night.

How you felt the next morning.

After a week, look for a pattern.

TRY THIS TOMORROW:

If you normally nap late in the day, try moving the nap earlier.

Then see what happens.

6. YOU MAY BE TRYING TOO HARD TO SLEEP

This one is easy to miss.

You get into bed.

You look at the clock.

You realise you have only six hours left before you need to get up.

Then you start worrying.

"Why am I not asleep?"

"I have to sleep."

"Tomorrow is going to be terrible."

The more you focus on sleep, the more important the problem can feel.

For people with ongoing insomnia, treatments based on cognitive and behavioural methods have strong evidence behind them. Research in older adults has found that these approaches can improve several measures of insomnia.

This does not mean you can simply "stop worrying."

It means that sleep problems often need more than basic sleep tips.

TRY THIS:

Do not turn one bad night into a disaster.

If you wake during the night, remind yourself:

"I do not have to force sleep. I can simply rest."

Avoid repeatedly checking the clock.

And if sleep problems continue, consider speaking with a healthcare professional about evidence-based treatment for insomnia.

TRY THIS TONIGHT:

Turn the clock away from you.

7. YOUR SLEEP PROBLEM MAY NOT BE A SLEEP-HABIT PROBLEM

This may be the most important point in the whole guide.

Sometimes poor sleep is not caused by coffee, naps or bedtime habits.

There may be another reason.

For example:

LOUD SNORING

BREATHING PAUSES DURING SLEEP

GASPING OR CHOKING DURING THE NIGHT

STRONG DAYTIME SLEEPINESS

ONGOING TROUBLE FALLING OR STAYING ASLEEP

UNCOMFORTABLE OR RESTLESS LEGS

PERSISTENT PAIN

A MAJOR CHANGE IN YOUR SLEEP THAT YOU CANNOT EXPLAIN

Some of these can be signs of a sleep disorder or another health problem.

That does not mean you have a medical condition.

It means it is worth getting checked rather than trying to solve everything with sleep tips.

The National Institute on Aging recommends talking with a healthcare professional when sleep problems continue.

YOUR NEXT STEP:

If any of these signs sound familiar, make a note of them and discuss them with your doctor or another qualified healthcare professional.

A SIMPLE 7-DAY SLEEP RESET

Do not try to change everything at once.

For the next seven days, focus on one small thing each day.

DAY 1

Choose a regular wake-up time.

DAY 2

Get outside during the day and add some safe movement.

DAY 3

Move your last caffeine earlier.

DAY 4

Look at whether evening alcohol affects your sleep.

DAY 5

Look at your naps.

DAY 6

Stop watching the clock during the night.

DAY 7

Look back at what happened.

What helped?

What did not?

What surprised you?

Remember:

This is an experiment.

You are learning about your own sleep.

YOUR SIMPLE SLEEP CHECK-IN

Use this for one week.

DATE:

BEDTIME:

TIME I GOT OUT OF BED:

HOW MANY TIMES I REMEMBER WAKING:

NAP:

CAFFEINE AFTER LUNCH:

ALCOHOL:

DAYTIME MOVEMENT:

TIME OUTDOORS:

HOW RESTED DID I FEEL THIS MORNING?

1 2 3 4 5

NOT RESTED VERY RESTED

ONE THING I NOTICED:

A sleep diary can help you see patterns that are easy to miss from memory.

WHAT IF YOU STILL CANNOT SLEEP WELL?

Do not assume that you have failed.

Sleep can be affected by many things.

Your routine is only one part of the picture.

If sleep problems continue, especially if they affect your daytime life, talk with a healthcare professional.

You should also seek professional advice if you have:

- Loud snoring or breathing pauses
- Gasping during sleep
- Strong daytime sleepiness
- Persistent insomnia
- Significant or ongoing pain
- Restless or uncomfortable legs at night
- A major unexplained change in your sleep
- A possible medication-related sleep problem

This guide is not designed to diagnose these problems.

It is designed to help you notice what may be worth investigating.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

There is no single "magic" sleep habit.

Good sleep is usually the result of several things working together.

Your daily schedule.

Your activity.

Your light exposure.

Your caffeine.

Your alcohol use.

Your naps.

Your thoughts about sleep.

And, sometimes, an underlying sleep or health problem.

The goal is not to become obsessed with sleep.

The goal is to understand your sleep better.

Then make sensible changes one at a time.

A NOTE FROM SARAH

You do not need to become perfect at sleeping.

You do not need a bedroom full of expensive gadgets.

And you do not need to follow twenty complicated rules every night.

Start small.

Pick one thing from this guide.

Try it for several days.

Pay attention to what happens.

Then decide what is worth keeping.

That is a much more useful approach than trying every sleep tip you see online.

And remember:

Getting older does not mean you have to give up on sleeping well.

WANT TO GO FURTHER?

You now know seven things worth checking.

But knowing what may be affecting your sleep is only the beginning.

The next question is:

WHAT SHOULD YOU ACTUALLY DO?

That is why I created:

THE BETTER SLEEP AFTER 50 METHOD

A complete step-by-step system for improving sleep after 50

This is the next step for anyone who wants more than a list of sleep tips.

It takes the ideas in this free guide and turns them into a practical system you can work through step by step.

Inside, you will learn how to:

- Understand your current sleep pattern
- Build a better sleep routine
- Improve your daytime habits
- Work out what may be getting in the way of better sleep
- Create a calmer evening routine
- Deal with common sleep problems
- Track your progress
- Build habits you can actually maintain

The free guide helped you identify possible problems.

The Better Sleep After 50 Method is designed to help you put the pieces together.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BETTER SLEEP AFTER 50 METHOD]

A FINAL WORD

Thank you for spending some time with me.

I hope this guide has given you a few useful ideas and, more importantly, helped you look at your sleep in a different way.

You do not have to change everything tonight.

Choose one small step.

See what happens.

And if your sleep problems continue, do not simply accept them as part of getting older. Talk to a qualified healthcare professional.

Better sleep starts with understanding what is happening.

Sarah

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NOTE:

Research findings are summarized in plain language. Associations described in observational research do not prove that one factor causes another.