



Words Tracey Smith

A-Zzzz of better sleep

Hot summer nights, twisted sheets and sticky, sweaty skin are not conducive to a restful night's slumber but, when the heat is on, what's a girl to do? Opening a window might offer some respite, but general street noise can be just as bad as the relentless heat at putting you off your Zzzs. Add a tossing and turning partner into the equation and you might as well forget it. The good news is you really needn't lose any sleep this summer – follow our indispensable guide to getting a good night's kip and you'll soon be sleeping like a baby...

1 say no to a nightcap

Although a glass of wine can make you feel drowsy and help you drop off to sleep, it also makes you feel hotter by speeding up your heart rate, increasing blood flow to your skin and making you sweat. Not only that, but, according to Swedish doctor Erik Skovenborg, as the alcohol level in your body drops during the night, it causes you to have more vivid dreams, making you wake up feeling sweaty and restless.

2 eat for slumber

Avoid foods containing the amino acid tyramine, such as bacon, ham, cheese, red wine, avocado, raspberries and soy sauce, as they can keep you awake. Tyramine raises blood pressure and causes the release of the brain stimulant noradrenaline. Instead, opt for lettuce, which contains a sedative called lactucarium, or try turkey, tuna, bananas, figs or yogurt, which contain sleep-promoting tryptophan. Nutritionist Anita Bean recommends a high-protein supper, such as seared tuna steak with green veg or a salad niçoise. Or try a bowl of cornflakes – they will raise your brain's serotonin levels, which control the sleep cycle. Increasing your vitamin-B6 intake (sources include low-fat milk and lean meat) will also help fight insomnia, as it's needed to produce serotonin.

3 soak yourself sleepy

Ever wondered why you feel so dozy after a soak in the tub? Researchers

at the University Of South Australia have discovered the answer. It seems that the cooling down of your body once you get out of the bath mimics your body's natural sleep-initiation mechanism. 'About 60 to 90 minutes before falling asleep, your body starts to lose heat from its core, which brings on tiredness,' says research fellow Dr Cameron Van Den Heuvel. Forget having an ice-cold shower, though, as it will make your body generate heat to compensate.

4 choose cold comfort

Using the right bedclothes is vital on hot, sticky nights, especially when you consider that we sweat out about 500ml of water overnight – even more if it's hot. To keep your head cool, try the John Cotton Airstream pillow, £16.99 (available from Argos), which contains a pocket of air that acts as a pump, circulating cool, fresh air around your head. Phil Atherton of John Cotton also advises choosing natural fillings such as goose feather and down to keep cool and fresh at night, as synthetic pillows reflect heat, keeping your head warm. Avoiding covers allows sweat to evaporate efficiently, but if you prefer to have covers, opt for a cotton sheet, which wicks sweat away from your body, or a thin silk duvet – silk creates an even body temperature.

5 soothe your senses

Invest in an aromatherapy diffuser fan, such as the Tisserand Aroma-Stream Diffuser, £25.99, which will waft cool air over your body. Try adding a few drops of sleep-inducing essential oil, such as

lavender, marjoram, sandalwood, ho leaf or ylang ylang, or the Insomnia Formula, £10.95 for 10ml (01494 798301), which contains all five.

6 use your imagination

Visualisation can help cool your body's core temperature, allowing you to fall asleep more easily. Research at the University Of South Australia involved training people to raise or lower the temperature of their hands by visualising images such as lying on a beach. Amazingly, 75% to 80% of those studied successfully raised or lowered their temperature by 1.5°C or more – enough to regulate their core temperature and trigger sleep. Imagine you're lazing under a shady tree or lying by the sea enjoying a cool breeze.

7 chill your extremities

Filling a hot-water bottle with ice-cold water and taking it to bed with you can help reduce your body heat, inducing sleep, according to The Sleep Council. Another useful tip is to put your pillowcase in the fridge before bed so that it cools your head. If all else fails, try investing in a couple of Mentholatum Migraine Ice patches, £3.99 for two from Boots, and pop them on your forehead – they'll help cool your skin without leaving a wet patch.

8 hot loving!

You might not feel like going near a hot, sweaty body, but having an orgasm releases the bonding hormone oxytocin, which aids sleep, slows the heart rate and reduces blood pressure in women. □