in search of sleep

Sometimes it's hard to fall asleep. Excitement or worries can keep your mind going long after you want to doze off. It happens to all of us. But if it keeps happening, it can become a habit. Don’t let your bedtime become a source of stress. Here are some simple things you can do to keep your sleep sweet:

• **Get on a schedule.** As much as you can, try to go to bed at the same time each night. Let your body get into a sleep rhythm. This means no naps longer than 20 minutes. You want to be tired at bedtime.

• **Make a bedtime routine.** If you’re going to bed at the same time each night, why not do the same things before you go to bed, too? Doing the same actions in the same order each night can help signal your mind and body that it’s time to get sleepy.

• **Keep it quiet.** Your bedroom should be a cool and restful place. Use another room for reading, watching TV, or talking on the phone. Think about using a small fan to cover up outside noise.

• **Be active during the day.** If you get out and move during the day, it can help you feel tired at night. If you find that exercise right before bedtime keeps you up, try working out 3 or more hours before you go to bed.

• **Eat and drink light.** Heavy or spicy meals before bedtime can give you heartburn or an upset stomach. Caffeine can stay in your body for up to 8 hours. And alcohol can make it harder for you to get to sleep or stay asleep.

Most people need 7-9 hours of sleep each night—even as they get older. Try these sleep tips for a while, and see what works for you. If you still have trouble sleeping, talk with your doctor at your next visit.
You heard the call to action, and you answered with your walking shoes. You’ve got your friends on a walking schedule. You may even have a few routes that you walk on your own. You feel better, sleep better, and have more energy. But now you want more. When your usual walk just isn’t enough, you may be ready to kick it up a notch.

There are a lot of ways to step up your walking routine. Start with a look at your usual route and how long it takes to complete. Can you go farther or faster? Try to pick up the pace and drop your time by a few minutes. You could add a couple of blocks or laps to your walk. Or you could change your route to include a hill.

There are other ways to step up your daily activity with no steps at all. Have you thought about riding a bike? Even a stationary bike can be fun. You could also try a spinning class at a local gym or fitness center. As you add new activities to your routine, you’ll move and strengthen your body in new ways. Here are a few more activities you may want to try:

- Swimming
- Tennis
- Water aerobics
- Tai chi
- Yoga

If you aren’t sure what you want to try, check around your neighborhood. Some local community centers have programs to support being active. If you belong to a fitness center or plan to join one, ask about classes designed for older adults. The Internet may also give you leads to activity groups in your area—just be cautious about this. Make sure the group is well-known and meets in a public area.

As you take on more steps or try new sports, be sure to protect your health. Always talk to your doctor before you change your exercise routine. And learn what type of clothing, shoes, or other gear—such as a bike helmet—you may need to stay safe.

Being active is a great way to improve your health. Studies show staying active can keep you moving and independent through the years. And if you find activities that you enjoy, it can even make life more fun.
Your smile still needs you

It happens when you see a friend, or hear a joke, or just because you’re having a good day. Your smile is part of what makes life fun. And it is just as important to take care of it now as it was when your first tooth came in. If you’re like many people, you may not always give your teeth the attention they deserve. Here are a few tips for a healthy mouth.

When you brush:

- **Don’t rush the brush.** Brush your teeth at least twice a day, and take your time. Wait at least 30 minutes after eating to brush, or you may brush away tooth enamel. This is because foods and drinks that are high in acid (such as orange juice and tomatoes) can soften tooth enamel.

- **Pick your paste.** Find a fluoride toothpaste in a flavor that you like. If you shop around, you’ll find that mint is just one of your many options.

- **The soft side.** Pick a toothbrush with soft bristles (this is better for your gums). And be sure the head is the right size for your mouth. If it is too big, it may be hard to brush well. If your arthritis makes it hard to hold the brush, think about getting an electric toothbrush.

- **Slide in the floss.** Floss before or after you brush. Try a waxed floss if you have trouble getting it in between your teeth. Floss holders are available, if you find it hard to grasp the floss. And some flosses are flavored.

If you wear dentures:

- **Eat, then rinse.** Rinse your dentures after you eat.

- **Scrub daily.** Use a mild soap, like dish soap or denture cleaner, and a soft brush to scrub your dentures each day.

- **Keep brushing.** Even though you have dentures, you should still brush your mouth and tongue with a soft bristled brush. If you rinse and gargle with mouthwash, it can help your mouth stay clean and fresh.

- **Let them soak.** Soak your dentures overnight. You can use water, or a denture soak solution.

- **Rinse before wearing.** After you’ve soaked your dentures overnight, rinse them before you put them back in. This is important if you use a denture solution.

- **Get a professional cleaning.** Most dentists suggest getting your dentures checked and cleaned twice a year. You should also have them checked if they start feeling loose or the fit feels wrong.

Whether you have dentures or your own teeth, it’s important to keep your mouth moist. If your mouth is often dry, it can increase your chance of tooth loss. Age and some medicines can make your mouth feel dry. To help with this, drink more water or suck on a sugar-free candy. Some special mouthwashes are also available for this condition. If you are concerned about dry mouth, talk with your dentist or doctor during your next visit.
is menthol worse?

Menthol cigarettes have been in the news a lot lately. They make up almost one-third of all cigarettes sold. With that much of the market involved, you may want to know if menthol can harm smokers. You know tobacco smoke is deadly. But can menthol make the dangers of tobacco worse?

Some experts think the answer may be “yes.” This is because there are some differences between menthol and regular cigarettes. Research shows menthol cigarettes can:

- Slow the body’s use of nicotine, and keep it in the body longer
- Reduce the pain and burning feeling that happens when a smoker breathes in tobacco smoke (by making the throat and mouth feel cool and numb)
- Hide the taste that comes from breathing in tobacco smoke

Experts think these differences may make menthol cigarettes more addictive than regular cigarettes. People who smoke menthol cigarettes often find it harder to quit than people who smoke regular cigarettes. The better taste, numbing effect, and higher dose of nicotine may keep menthol smokers hooked.

There is also some concern about the way menthol cigarettes are marketed. Some ads may give people the idea that menthols are not as bad as other cigarettes. The images in the ads are cool, natural, and youthful. This may give people the idea that menthols are a healthier choice.

The truth is that any smoking is unhealthy. There is no safe cigarette. And menthol is not better. All types of cigarettes can lead to health problems such as heart disease and lung cancer.

Trying to quit is worth your time at any age. For your health, and the health of those around you, talk to your doctor if you smoke and want to quit.