The Importance of Your Sleep Environment: Optimize a Bedroom for Sleep

It may seem like a rather inconsequential thing, but you shouldn't underestimate the importance of your sleep environment. It may be the one thing that helps you quickly transition to rest - or the thing that keeps you tossing and turning all night in fits of insomnia. Consider 5 ways to optimize a bedroom for sleep, including factors such as noise, temperature, lighting, and your mattress selection.

What Is a Sleep Environment?

The sleep environment is simply the space in which you attempt to sleep. In most cases, this means your bedroom. It may vary as our lifestyle dictates. For example, a business trip, a prolonged flight, or a camping expedition may result in sleep environments as variable as a hotel, an airplane, or a tent. Ideally the space in which we attempt to sleep would be conducive to our efforts.

Not everyone will agree on what makes for the best features of a chosen sleep environment. This may lead to [relationship problems](#) between bed partners, requiring that we attempt to find common ground.

There are a handful of common variables, however, that should be acknowledged:

1. Noise

In general, it is easiest to sleep in a quiet place. Whether it is a vestige of surviving in the wilderness or for some other reason, we tend to respond to external stimuli while asleep. In other words, if we hear a noise, we will wake up. This is advantageous if a lion is trying to eat us while we sleep in a cave, but when the neighbor is blasting the radio too loud, it is less desirable.

When we hear noise, we may not become fully conscious, but we certainly will come out of the deeper [stages of sleep](#). If we are trying to sleep in a noisy environment, our ability to enjoy restful deep sleep will be compromised. It is therefore best to try to keep things as quiet as possible.

Some may benefit from using a white noise machine (or a fan), putting in earplugs, or keeping a radio or television on low volume to drown out street noises.

2. Temperature

Most people prefer to sleep in a slightly cool environment. You may bury yourself in thick blankets, but no matter how you choose to sleep, you no doubt want to be at the right temperature. If you wake up shivering or drenched in sweat, the temperature of your sleep environment is a problem. Why is it a problem? It woke you up!

Consider the temperatures you would experience if you were to sleep outside. The air temperature falls off over night. Similarly, our body temperature dips around 4 AM. This helps to preserve our energy (as a big difference would lead to more heat loss). If you experience insomnia, it can even be helpful to take a warm bath or shower in the hour preceding bedtime as cooling off may help the transition to sleep.

3. Lighting

The amount of light in your bedroom can impact how well you sleep. In general, it is best to sleep in darkness. You may prefer to have a nightlight (especially for safety reasons if you get up during the night to urinate). Our body's natural circadian rhythm tends to want to follow the natural dark-light cycle. Therefore, even if you are working nights, you should probably try to keep it dark when you are trying to sleep. Morning sunlight can be a key factor that will help you to wake. On the other hand, exposure to artificial screen light may actually keep you awake and cause insomnia. Power down in the hour or two before bedtime to help preserve your ability to fall asleep.

4. Bedding/Mattress

There are a variety of options in how people choose to sleep, and there is no one right way. Variations may relate to personal preference, cultural practices, financial situations, and many other factors. One thing to consider may be the size and firmness of your mattress. You may prefer only a sheet or mounds of blankets or a thick comforter. Regardless of your options, make sure that your comfort is kept a priority. Don't break the bank thinking that an expensive mattress will solve your sleep problems; check in with a sleep doctor first to ensure there is not a sleep disorder contributing to your difficulties.

5. Preserving the Sleep Environment

The bedroom can sometimes become a multipurpose room, especially if you have space constraints (such as those living in college dorms). You may choose to have a television in your bedroom or even sleep with your favorite pet at your side.

The bedroom space should be a relaxing place and not a source of stress or stimulation. As part of the general guidelines for good sleep, bedrooms are for sleep and sex, not for other activities. You should not be doing work there. Various electronics (televisions, gaming systems, computers, telephones, and other gadgets) should be removed from your sleep environment. Not only will they prevent you from falling asleep, but they may become disruptive at inopportune times and wake you back up.

By carefully considering the variables in your sleep environment and preserving the space to foster a good night's sleep, you will be able to rest better and wake up ready to have a successful and productive day.

http://sleepdisorders.about.com/od/howcanisleepbetter/a/The-Importance-Of-Your-Sleep-Environment.htm