



SLEEP PROCRASTINATION

Sleep Procrastination: Why People Procrastinate on Going to Sleep and How to Stop

Sleep procrastination is a phenomenon where people unnecessarily delay going to sleep, especially when they know that doing so is bad for them. For example, someone who wants to go to sleep but instead lays in bed and browses social media on their phone for hours is engaging in sleep procrastination.

Sleep procrastination is a widespread phenomenon, with serious negative consequences for the people who engage in it. As such, in the following article you will learn more about sleep procrastination, understand why people do it, and see what you can do to avoid it yourself.

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Prevalence of sleep procrastination

Sleep procrastination is a common phenomenon, that has been observed in a [wide range](#) of populations, including [adolescents](#), [college students](#), and [adults](#). For example, in [one study](#) on an adult sample, 74% of people who were surveyed indicated that they go to bed later than they planned to at least once a week, with no external reason for doing so.

This is important to keep in mind if you engage in sleep procrastination yourself or if you know someone who does it, because it shows that even though this phenomenon can be highly problematic, it's something that many other people struggle with too.

Dangers of sleep procrastination

Sleep procrastination is [associated](#) with worse [quality](#) and quantity of sleep, which can cause [many issues](#), including [lack of sleep](#) (or sleep deprivation), [fatigue](#), exhaustion, worse emotional wellbeing, and worse mental and physical health.

Furthermore, sleep procrastination can lead to many negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, shame, and guilt, especially when the sleep procrastinator repeatedly engages in it even though they know it's bad for them and even though they want to stop.

In addition, when sleep procrastination causes tiredness, this can [lead to reduced capacity](#) for self-regulation, and [consequently to increased procrastination](#), both when it comes to sleep, and when it comes to other things, like [workplace tasks](#).

Finally, sleep procrastination is also associated with various disorders, like [depression](#), and general procrastination is associated with various sleep disorders, like [insomnia](#). However, the nature of these associations is unclear, so they aren't necessarily caused by sleep procrastination.

How people procrastinate on going to sleep

There are [two main forms](#) of sleep procrastination:

- ***Bedtime procrastination***, which involves unnecessarily postponing going to bed. For example, this can involve organizing the house needlessly or wasting time snacking late at night, when you should be going to bed.
- ***While-in-bed procrastination***, which involves unnecessarily postponing going to sleep, after already getting into bed. For example, this can involve laying in bed watching videos on your phone, when you should be going to sleep.

While these two forms of sleep procrastination [are associated](#), they can have different causes and lead to different outcomes, and a person might engage in only one of them and not the other. Accordingly, they sometimes require different solutions, though many anti-procrastination techniques can help with both forms of sleep procrastination.

Note that most research on sleep procrastination has focused on bedtime procrastination. Accordingly, the term "bedtime procrastination" is sometimes used interchangeably with "sleep procrastination", and "bedtime procrastination" is sometimes also used to refer to delaying getting into bed after having [fully prepared](#) to go to sleep (e.g., by powering off all of one's electronic devices), though [questionnaires](#) that are used to measure bedtime procrastination don't always account for that.

However, from a practical perspective, the academic distinctions between bedtime procrastination and sleep procrastination generally aren't important. Rather, what is important is to understand that sleep procrastination can take the form of both bedtime procrastination and while-in-bed procrastination, and to account for this when trying to understand and solve your sleep procrastination.

Why people procrastinate on going to sleep

People procrastinate on going to sleep because issues like available entertainment and a misaligned biological clock outweigh their self-control and motivation. These issues include personal factors, like stress and wanting to feel in control, and situational factors, like digital distractions and an uncomfortable sleep environment.

Specifically, in order to go to sleep on time, people generally rely on their self-control, which is supported by their motivation. A person's motivation to go to sleep can be based on various things, like wanting to stop feeling tired now or wanting to feel well-rested the next day.

However, issues like stress and digital entertainment can interfere with and oppose people's self-control and motivation. When these issues exert a more powerful influence than a person's self-control and motivation, that person procrastinates on going to sleep, until the balance between these factors shifts in the person's favor, for example because they become so tired that going to sleep is more appealing than the available entertainment.

Accordingly, common causes of sleep procrastination include the following:

- **Unpleasant emotions** that people expect to experience if they go to sleep, like anxiety and stress, potentially due to issues like struggling to fall asleep in a poor sleep environment.
- **Available entertainment**, which is often (but not always) digital, for example in the form of social media or TV shows. This can lead to *mindless bedtime procrastination*, when people lose track of time because they're immersed in evening and nighttime activities.
- **Desire for control**, when people postpone going to sleep as a way to feel in charge of their schedule, sometimes by rebelling against an authority figure.
- **Lack of motivation**, for example if people don't care much about how tired they'll feel tomorrow because there's time before that happens.
- **Effort of getting ready for sleep**, especially if this involves a tedious process, or if people have to overcome substantial inertia in order to get started.
- **Low capacity for self-control**, especially since sleep usually comes at the end of people's days, when they tend to feel tired after having exerted energy and self-control throughout the day. This means that although being tired increases people's motivation to go to sleep, it can also make it harder for them to exert the self-control that they need in order to do it.
- **Biological misalignment**, for example in terms of people's biological clock (or circadian rhythm), which can make them feel awake when they should be going to sleep (due to circadian misalignment). Another important biological factor is people's chronotype (preference for being active at a certain time of the day), and specifically being an evening type (*night owl*) rather than a morning type (*early bird*).
- **Poor sleep hygiene**, due to issues like consuming caffeine shortly before bedtime, as well as related issues that were mentioned above, like a poor sleep environment and engagement with stimulating digital entertainment.

These issues can cause procrastination cycles, for example when someone procrastinates on going to sleep, which causes them to wake up late, which shifts their biological clock and makes them more likely to procrastinate on going to sleep again.

Sleep procrastination is similar to other types of procrastination in terms of its causes, but is also unique in some ways. Specifically, it's rarely caused by certain issues that frequently cause procrastination, like perfectionism and fear of evaluation. Conversely, it's more likely than other types of procrastination to be caused by certain biological factors, like people's circadian rhythm, chronotype, and diet. In addition, unlike many other things that people procrastinate on, going to sleep is something they always have to do eventually, and can't postpone for too long.

How to stop procrastinating on going to sleep

To stop procrastinating on going to sleep, you should first figure out [why you do it](#), and then use relevant [anti-procrastination techniques](#) to solve those issues. For example, if you procrastinate on going to sleep because you get distracted while browsing the internet, you can use a browser extension to block your internet access past a certain hour, to help you go to sleep on time.

Below is a list of techniques that you can use. Pick the ones that seem like they'll best address the specific causes of your sleep procrastination. Try starting with just a few techniques, and if necessary, you can add additional ones gradually as you make progress.

Improve your bedtime habits:

- **Finish your obligations as early as reasonably possible before you intend to sleep.** For example, if you need to shower before going to sleep, try to do this relatively early, rather than waiting until right before you should be going to sleep, so that it won't be a reason for delaying. This is especially important if the obligations that you have before sleeping are aversive (e.g., because you find them boring or unpleasant), since this can make it more likely that you'll postpone them, and that you'll consequently procrastinate on going to sleep. Essentially, your goal in finishing your obligations early is to make it as easy and as painless as possible for you to go to sleep once it's time to do so.
- **Develop a consistent and calming bedtime routine.** Having a consistent bedtime routine can help you signal to your body that it's time to go to sleep, and [can help](#) you get in the right mindset for sleeping. This routine should be as simple, calming, and enjoyable as possible, to make sure that you stick to it consistently.
- **Add a time delay before procrastinating.** If, when you should be sleeping or getting ready to sleep, you find yourself about to procrastinate, try adding a time delay before you indulge your impulse to do so. For example, if you should be going to sleep but are about to start a new episode of your favorite TV show instead, count until 30 before you allow yourself do so, to try and overcome your initial impulse to procrastinate.

Improve your sleep hygiene:

- **Minimize exposure to light before bedtime.** The closer you are to your intended bedtime, the [more](#) you should [minimize](#) your exposure to light, and especially to bright light and blue light. If you use digital devices before bedtime, one way to achieve this is to use relevant apps or built-in settings, which reduce the screen brightness and the amount of blue light that the screen emits.
- **Avoid stimulating activities before bedtime.** The closer you get to your bedtime, the [more](#) you should [avoid](#) stimulating activities that wake you up, since they can make you more likely to postpone going to sleep.
- **Avoid caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol in the hours before bedtime.** The closer you are to your bedtime, the more you should [avoid](#) these substances, which can make you feel [more awake](#) and consequently make you more likely to postpone going to sleep.
- **Avoid eating problematic food before bedtime.** This can involve, for example, big or spicy meals, which can make it [harder](#) for you to fall asleep, and consequently more likely to procrastinate on going to sleep.

Improve your sleep environment:

- **Make your bed comfortable.** For example, [make sure](#) that your mattress, blanket, and pillows feel comfortable to you.
- **Make your bedroom comfortable.** For example, [make sure](#) that your bedroom isn't too bright or loud, isn't stuffy, and is the right temperature for you (while noting that it's generally [better](#) to keep the temperature

relatively cool).

- **Eliminate distractions and temptations.** For example, use a [dedicated app](#) to block access to social media sites that you tend to procrastinate on before sleep, or leave your laptop and phone in a different room than your bedroom.

Change your sleep habits:

- **Set a consistent sleep schedule.** Going to sleep and getting up at a [consistent time each day](#) makes it easier for your body to adjust to your desired sleep schedule. This means that you should try to keep your sleep and wake times as consistent as possible over time.
- **Wake up earlier.** Waking up earlier can prompt you to go to sleep earlier too, since it will generally make you tired and ready for sleep earlier.
- **Minimize napping as much as possible.** Napping can make it [harder](#) for you to go to sleep at your desired time, so you [should](#) generally avoid napping, or minimize the amount of napping that you do and restrict it to short periods of time and that are substantially earlier than your intended bedtime.

Change your general habits:

- **Minimize the use of your bed and bedroom for things other than sleeping.** Try to [avoid](#) using your bedroom and especially your bed for things other than sleeping as much as reasonably possible, in order to [help](#) your body [associate them](#) primarily with sleep.
- **Get exposure to light during the day.** Exposure to light (and especially sunlight) throughout the day can help [calibrate](#) your body's biological clock, which can make it easier for you to go to sleep on time.
- **Exercise.** Exercising during the day can [help you](#) go to sleep on time, through a number of physical mechanisms that benefit your body's biological clock. However, since exercise is generally a stimulating activity, you should [avoid](#) engaging in it too close to your intended bedtime.

Improve your planning:

- **Set concrete goals.** You should be as clear as possible about how much sleep you want to get and when you intend to go to sleep, since doing so increases the likelihood that you'll go to sleep on time. For example, instead of saying "I want to get enough sleep, so I should go to sleep around ten or eleven" it's better to say "I want to get 8 hours of sleep, so I'll go to sleep at ten".
- **Have a clear plan for achieving your goals.** Specifically, figure out what you need to do in order to ensure that you'll go to sleep on time, and how you're going to do it. For example, if you need to shower and brush your teeth before going to sleep, figure out exactly when you're going to do these things, so that you won't delay them and consequently also delay going to sleep.
- **Use mental contrasting and implementation intentions.** [To do this](#), you should first name your goal of going to sleep on time, and then elaborate on the best outcome of doing so (e.g. feeling happy and well-rested), before identifying and visualizing a central inner obstacle to achieving this outcome (e.g. the urge to keep browsing the internet). Then, you should create *if-then plans*, which explain how you'll deal with obstacles that you might encounter while trying to achieve your goals.

Increase your motivation:

- **Clearly identify why you want to go to sleep on time.** Reasons can include, for example, wanting to feel well-rested or in control of your schedule, and these reasons should [preferably](#) be intrinsic and autonomous (e.g., because they [align](#) with your values and needs).

- **Visualize your future self.** For example, you can visualize how tired and disappointed you'll feel the next day if you keep procrastinating on going to sleep, or how well-rested and satisfied you'll feel if you manage to go to sleep on time.
- **Remind yourself that sleep is a top priority for you.** For example, if you feel that you're about to procrastinate on going to sleep by [browsing social media](#), remind yourself that sleep is more important to you.
- **Acknowledge and reward your progress.** For example, you can decide that if you go to sleep on time for a week in a row, you will celebrate this achievement in a way that's meaningful to you.

Change your mindset:

- **Make sleep something that you look forward to.** For example, if you view sleep as something stressful, try to find ways to deal with the causes of your stress, with the help of a professional if necessary, to help yourself view sleep as a more positive experience.
- **Give yourself permission to make mistakes.** For example, don't be too hard on yourself if you take a while to overcome your sleep procrastination, or if you make mistakes along the way, and especially don't let these things cause you to give up entirely. Furthermore, if you realize that you're currently procrastinating on going to sleep, accept that it's better to go to sleep now rather than later, even if you could have gone to sleep earlier had you not procrastinated at all.
- **Develop self-compassion.** Developing [self-compassion](#) can [reduce the likelihood](#) that you'll engage in sleep procrastination. Specifically, this consists of three components that you should develop: *self-kindness*, which involves being kind to yourself, *common humanity*, which involves recognizing that everyone experiences challenges, and [mindfulness](#), which involves accepting your emotions in a non-judgmental manner.
- **Develop self-efficacy.** [Self-efficacy](#) is the belief in your ability to perform the actions needed to achieve your goals, and it can help reduce your procrastination. To develop self-efficacy, you should identify the various strategies that you can use to go to sleep on time, and then think about your ability to execute those strategies successfully.

Keep in mind that the effectiveness and practicality of different anti-procrastination techniques [depend](#) on various personal and situational factors. This means that you shouldn't worry if a certain technique works well for others but not for you, and that you should focus on finding the techniques that will work best in *your* particular case.

How to help someone else stop procrastinating on going to sleep

There are several things that you can do to [help](#) someone stop procrastinating on going to sleep:

- **Raise their awareness of the issue.** For example, you can go over their sleep schedule with them to show them that they tend to postpone going to sleep unnecessarily, and help them clearly see why it's a problem (e.g. because it makes them tired and stressed out).
- **Help them figure out how to overcome their procrastination.** For example, you can help them identify the specific causes of their sleep procrastination, and help them choose which anti-procrastination techniques to use (from the list of such techniques in the previous section).
- **Help them implement relevant anti-procrastination techniques.** For example, if they decide to limit their available distractions in bed, you can help them by reminding them to log off their digital devices an hour before their intended bedtime.

- **Implement anti-procrastination techniques on their behalf.** For example, to increase their motivation, you can give them positive encouragement when they consistently make progress on going to sleep on time.

In general, and especially when implementing anti-procrastination techniques for someone, keep in mind that this should generally be done in a way that they accept, since pressuring someone to go to sleep when they don't want to can lead to issues such as resentment, which can exacerbate sleep procrastination. As such, it's [generally best](#) to help the sleep procrastinator develop intrinsic and autonomous motivation for going to sleep on time, and to make the process of avoiding sleep procrastination sometimes that they participate in gladly, rather than something that you force on them.

How to identify sleep procrastination

Most people are intuitively able to determine whether they procrastinate on going to sleep. However, if you're unsure about this, or if you want a formal tool for assessing sleep procrastination, there are several that you can use.

First, to assess bedtime procrastination, you can use the *Bedtime Procrastination Scale* (developed by Kroese, et al., [2014](#)):

For each of the following statements, decide whether it applies to you using a scale from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). A higher score indicates a greater tendency to engage in bedtime procrastination, except in questions followed by (R), where the reverse is true.

1. I go to bed later than I had intended.
2. I go to bed early if I have to get up early in the morning (R).
3. If it is time to turn off the lights at night I do it immediately (R).
4. Often I am still doing other things when it is time to go to bed.
5. I easily get distracted by things when I actually would like to go to bed.
6. I do not go to bed on time.
7. I have a regular sleep which I keep to (R).
8. I want to go to bed on time but I just don't.
9. I can easily stop with my activities when it is time to go to bed (R).

Alternatively, rather than scoring these questions directly, you can view them as general signs of sleep procrastination or the lack of it.

In addition, note that alternative criteria are sometimes used to determine whether someone engages in bedtime procrastination. For example, [one paper](#) suggests that there are three main criteria that you should consider when it comes to determining whether someone is engaging in sleep procrastination:

- **Delay**, in terms of going to bed later than intended or than was possible.
- **Lack of valid reason to delay.**
- **Foreseeably being worse off** as a result of the delay.

When it comes to while-in-bed procrastination, you can use the *While-in-Bed Procrastination Scale* (developed by Magalhães, et al., [2020](#)):

For each of the following statements, decide whether it applies to you using a scale from 1 (*almost*) never to 5 (*almost*) always. A higher score indicates a greater tendency to engage in while-in-bed procrastination.

While in bed, before I fall asleep I...

1. Watch videos on YouTube.
2. Watch TV.
3. Watch movies and series.
4. Listen to music.
5. Send texts, make video calls/calls.
6. Play games (tablet, computer, mobile phone).
7. Eat snacks (cookies, cereals, milk, chips, chocolate).

To assess while-in-bed procrastination, you can also use the same criteria as for bedtime procrastination, and namely delay, lack of valid reason to delay, and foreseeably being worse off as a result of the delay.

Finally, note that engaging in either type of sleep procrastination is enough to count as engaging in sleep procrastination. This means that even if someone engages just in bedtime procrastination or just in while-in-bed procrastination, that still constitutes as engaging in sleep procrastination overall.

■ Procrastination Guides

- < [Bedtime Procrastination: Why People Procrastinate on Going to Bed and How to Stop](#)
- > [Procrastination Types: Understanding the Different Ways People Procrastinate](#)

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