



# ightstraight

Summer 2009

## The Guide to Better Sleep and Health

### Dr. Robert Oexman

answers your  
sleep questions



## Ask the Oexpert

**Q:** I recently turned 50, and my sleep quality just isn't what it used to be. I toss and turn a lot at night, and wake up frequently. I am considering trying sleep medications. While I am a little worried about side-effects, I feel it would be the surest method. Does this sound like a good option for me?

—*Tired of Being Tired, VA*

**A:** Sleep medication is a possible option but I am always in favor of looking at solutions that may have no side effects and in the long run cost less.

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**I T'S SUMMER!** The position of the earth in orbit—with a little help from Daylight Saving Time—keeps the sun out until late in the evening.

## Summer

How do we sleep during the lazy days of summer?

Conditions are perfect for outdoor barbecues, park outings, and sunset viewings at the beach. But, how are longer days and all this outdoor activity affecting your sleep?

### HUMAN SUNDIALS

To shed some light on the subject, our circadian rhythms or internal “body clocks” control our sleep-wake cycles largely through exposure to dark and light. During winter months, days are shorter, and the harsh weather keeps

us hibernating indoors. Without sufficient exposure to light, our circadian clocks tend to malfunction, making it difficult to fall asleep.

Light exposure is also crucial for production of key hormones that affect our sleep patterns. In the nearly perpetual darkness of the winter, our bodies pro-

## of Sleep

duce too much melatonin, which forces us to conserve energy and feel sleepy during the day. This contributes to gloomy symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and “winter blues.”

### LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

The good news? Once the days get longer and we are exposed to longer  
*continued on page 4*

## You Snooze, You Lose? You Bet!

Summer is upon us and that means bathing suits, shorts and tank tops. Are you preparing by choosing carrots over cookies and the treadmill over television? Well, there is one surefire way to jump start your fitness program that you may not have thought of. Try easing up on the punching bag and hitting the sack a few hours earlier instead.

### THE CHEMICAL BATTLE OF THE BULGE

We all know that less sleep equals less energy and activity, which can lead to lower metabolism and excess weight gain. But, the link between sleep and weight gain goes even deeper than that.

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Get beach ready in  
no time with more sleep



# Are We Too Wired To Sleep?

Once upon a time, before humans gained the ability to harness electricity (can you imagine such a time?), our internal body clocks kept to a strict schedule. When it was dark, we slept. When it was light, we were awake. People in pre-electrical times got an average of 10 hours of sleep per night, more than enough to get them through a full and productive day of work. Then, something happened that changed sleep schedules forever.

The invention of the light bulb, which graced us with 24 hours of daylight, marked the beginning of a sleep deficit that has been growing gradually over generations. Further down the technological timeline came telephones, radios, televisions, computers, and cellular devices that do so much more than make phone calls, all enabling us to stay “plugged in” and ever connected to the outside world. In the night-

ly hours we text, blog, share, and surf through a virtually infinite supply of information. We can post reviews on music videos from Japan, research where to get the world’s tastiest schnitzel...not to mention access hundreds of HD channels! Who has time to sleep with that kind of power?

The problem is, America’s batteries are in dire need of a re-charge. We are overworked, overstressed, and

desperately low on juice. Millions of Americans are suffering from sleep problems, trading healthy, natural sleep for caffeinated beverages or sleep aids. (The stresses of the economy, wars overseas, and concern about

forming some other form of digital transaction. For some, it means popping in our favorite sports video game, catching up on a TV show we have recorded on TiVo, or just flipping through to see what’s on. Using these digitized activities for relaxation too close to bedtime can have dire effects on our ability to get to sleep at night. We think we’re winding down, but the bright lights and flashing images are



Keep **televisions, computers, and other devices** out of **the bedroom** so your mind can view the room as a place of **rest.**

actually getting us hyped up.

According to a May 2003 study published in the Journal of Applied Physiology, staring at a bright monitor or playing video games before bed can not only affect your ability to get to sleep, but can also affect the quality of the sleep you get. Our biological clocks are wired to be awake when exposed to light. Researchers found that working at a computer or playing video games before bed affected body temperature and production of melatonin, a hormone the body uses in regulating our sleep-wake cycles. Subjects who played computer games before bed were found to produce lower levels of our natural chemical sleep inducer, melatonin. While sleeping, body temperatures remained higher than normal, indicating an inability to shut down completely.

decreasing our ‘carbon footprint’ can’t be helping anyone sleep soundly.) What’s worse, the National Sleep Foundation notes an increase in bringing work home to complete during off-hours—we can thank email and Blackberry devices for making this possible. Recent research warns us of the link between sleep deprivation and a whole slew of health problems. Is that enough to get us to unplug?

## INFORMATION OVERLOAD

After a hectic workday, we all want to unwind. For many of us, that means going on the computer and downloading music, uploading photos, or per-

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## GENERATION ELECTRIC

Our attachment to our mobile gadgets, computerized doohickeys, and all things digital is manifesting in the younger generations to a dangerous degree. Kids in grammar school today were raised in the computer age, and can't look back on the time before the internet and cell phones connected them to their entire clique during post-school hours.

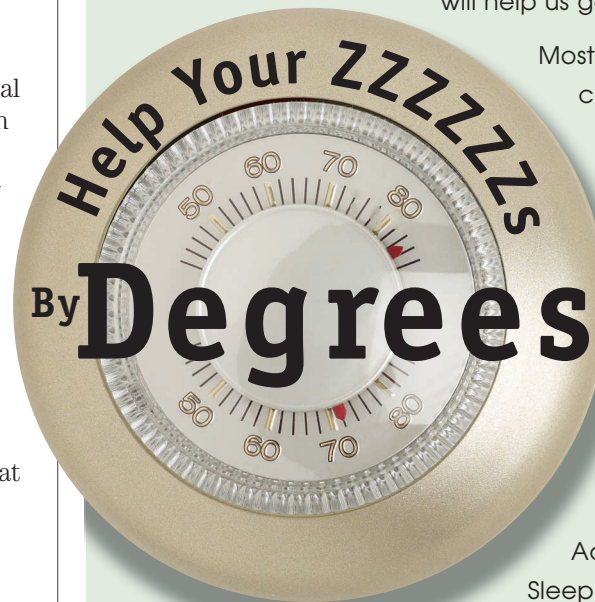
A study conducted by the National Centre On Sleep Disorders Research in the USA showed that teenagers who had 4 or more “mentally stimulating devices”—cell phones, TVs, computers—in their bedrooms were more likely to fall asleep while in class or while doing their homework. Ninety-seven percent of 11 to 17-year-olds had at least one of these devices in their bedroom, and only 1 in 5 respondents were getting the 9 hours of sleep that is recommended for that age group (*published in Youth Studies Australia, 2006*). If these practices continue unchecked, the long-term health effects could be severe for the coming generations that will be born with USB cables for veins.

## TIME TO DISCONNECT

Separation is difficult, no one is arguing that. Our love affair with all things electronic is exciting, expansive, extraterrestrial even. But, if you want to help yourself sleep better, it's time to unplug and truly unwind...at least a couple of hours before bedtime. Turn cell phones off before you get into bed so you won't be disturbed by late-night calls, text messages or Blackberry email alerts.

As better sleep tip lists all over the internet will tell you, it's a good idea to keep the bedroom about sleep. Keep televisions, computers, and any other mentally stimulating devices out of the bedroom so your mind can view the room as a place of rest. While getting the kids to turn off the TV and computer a good while before bed could be like asking them to stop breathing, remember...their health depends on it. ■

**N**ext time you find yourself frustrated with tossing and turning in the middle of the night, you might consider adjusting the temperature of your bedroom. In hot summer months, too many of us either kick off the sheets for relief of high temps, or crank up the air conditioning so high that we're shivering. Neither will help us get decent shut-eye.



Most researchers seem to agree a cooler temperature is more conducive to restful slumber. This is because cooler air follows our body's drop in temperature that occurs as we sleep. However, too low a temperature can keep your body alert as it tries to warm itself up.

## What To Do?

According to the National Sleep Foundation, temperatures above 75 degrees and below 54

degrees Fahrenheit may disturb sleep. Ideal temperature for each person varies considerably. The important thing is to find a temperature that you feel comfortable in.

During the summer months, turn down the air conditioning at night when your body is cooling down. This will not only keep your body from frigid awakenings, but will also save on your electric bill. On cooler summer nights, open a window and use a fan. The natural air will keep your nasal passages from drying out. In colder weather, thick blankets, socks, and warm bedclothes can help keep your body temperature at the right level.

## It Takes Two

Because of the subjectivity of ideal sleep temperatures, couples may have a bit more trouble deciding where to set the thermostat. What do you do when you and your partner have different ideas about what temp is the best? SleepFoundation.org offers a logical solution...compromise!

Try to find a temperature in between both of your ideal sleep temperatures. Then, agree to wear appropriate bedclothes and to use more or fewer blankets, depending on your individual tolerance to cold or heat. ■

# DON'T SLEEP AND DRIVE

**I**t's late

and you are in your car. You find your eyes closing and your head nodding forward intermittently. The next thing you know, you find yourself veering onto the shoulder not remembering how you got there.

## Does this scenario sound familiar?

If your answer is yes, you are certainly not alone. The National Sleep Foundation's 2008 Sleep in America Poll found that 36 percent of respon-

Report found that 100,000 police-reported crashes, 71,000 injuries, and 1,550 deaths occur due to drowsy driving every year in the U.S. These statistics, while shocking in their own right, are thought by the NSF to be underestimated in part because of the difficulty in classifying a crash as being caused by drowsy driving.

Unlike testing for alcohol consumption at a crash scene, there is no "breathalyzer" to determine whether an accident was caused by a driver falling asleep at the wheel. There are a series of clues to tell whether the driver in a crash was DWD (driving while drowsy)—the accident was caused by one vehicle, with no skid marks or other indicators of evasive maneuvering—but the degree of certainty in this method leaves much to be desired.

## According to [DrowsyDriving.org](http://DrowsyDriving.org), groups at higher risk of falling asleep at the wheel are:

- ▶ young people, especially males under 25
- ▶ shift workers and people who work long hours
- ▶ commercial drivers
- ▶ business travelers

As a result of the increasing number of car crashes caused by sleepy drivers, many state governments have begun enforcing restrictions such as curfews for new drivers and more severe punishment for fatal crashes caused by drowsy driving.

For more information about the NSF's State of the States Report on Drowsy Driving, visit [www.drowsydriving.org/stateofthestatesreport](http://www.drowsydriving.org/stateofthestatesreport). ■

## Summer of Sleep

*continued from page 1*

periods of sunlight, the light cues set our circadian clocks pretty much back to normal. Our bodies are able to produce more serotonin, the hormone that gives us energy during waking hours when we need it, resulting in more energized days and healthy energy declines as the sun goes down.

One factor that throws a bit of a kink in the summer sleep works is Daylight Saving Time (DST). In a government effort to conserve energy with more daylight in the evenings, we turn



**Our circadian rhythms or internal "body clocks" control our sleep-wake cycles through exposure to dark and light**

the clocks ahead one hour in March. Studies have shown that this lost hour causes a shift in our circadian sleep cycles that can disturb sleep patterns. However, we are mostly recovered from this shift about a week later.

So, summer not only means an end to too-cold-for-swimming temperatures and the beginning of snow cone and strawberry weather. It also means a period of more healthy, restful sleep for all. That's something we can all raise an ice-cold glass of lemonade to! ■

**"Like alcohol, sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness, impairs judgment and increases your risk of crashing"**

dents admitted to have driven while drowsy in the past year, and 32 percent reportedly drive drowsy at least 1 to 2 times every month.

We are a society that considers sleep deprivation the norm, so many of us neglect to think about how tired we are before getting behind the wheel. When leaving a social gathering after midnight, many of us would feel secure in driving as long as alcohol wasn't consumed, but how many of us consider how tired they are before putting the keys into the ignition?

It is important to note that experts are comparing the effects of drowsiness to alcohol influence: "Like alcohol, sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness, impairs judgment and increases your risk of crashing" ([www.drowsydriving.org](http://www.drowsydriving.org)).

The NSF's recent State of the States

# What's your Sleep Personality?

**R**eading someone's body language while they are awake is one thing. Reading it while they are asleep is another. Professor Chris Idzikowski, director of the UK Sleep Assessment and Advisory Service, discovered a link between six common sleep positions and specific personality types. See what your sleep position says about you:

## FETUS

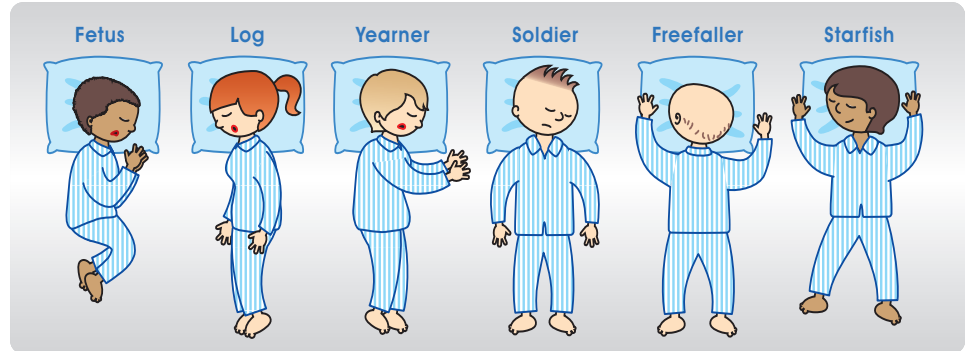
Similar to an M&M—hard exterior but soft on the inside—it takes a while for these curled up sleepers to warm up to new people, but they usually relax soon after. This sleep position is the most common (41% out of the 1,000 people studied) and more than twice as many women as men drift off to sleep in the fetus position.

## LOG

If you've ever heard the phrase "sleeping like a log," this is it. If you sleep on your side with both arms down, you are probably laid-back, sociable, and love the spotlight. You're very trusting, even to strangers, but tend to be a bit naïve.

## YEARNER

It is easy to see the open-natured personality of these sleepers, lying on their side with their arms stretched



out in front. If you are a yearner, you might have difficulty making decisions but rarely change your mind once you have come to a conclusion. You can also be paranoid and sarcastic.

## SOLDIER

Ten-hut! These straight-as-an-arrow back sleepers have both arms pinned down to the side. Similar to a militaristic lifestyle, people who sleep in this position are reserved and quiet. They set high standards for themselves and others.

## FREEFALL

Lying flat on their stomach, arms around the pillow and head to the side, these skydiver look-alikes are usually outgoing and can easily become hotheaded. They do not take criticism or confrontation very well, as

they are more sensitive than they let others know.

## STARFISH

Although they may lie on their backs with arms up and around the pillow, these back sleepers would rather hang out in the back of a crowd than be the center of attention. However they do get the spotlight when it comes to kindness. Always offering assistance and an open ear, mind and heart, these sleepers make great friends. ■

**I**f sleeping through the night is a dream unrealized, there is a very simple solution that just might make it come true – white noise.

Just like white light, which describes a light containing all imaginable colors, white noise is a combination of all possible sounds and frequencies.

night in silence, but were continuously interrupted by household noises or rapid thoughts; or to the sound of the television, but became more interested in the show than falling asleep, it might be difficult to believe that the sound of a crowded arena or another indescribable noise can actually help you

# BLACKOUT with WHITE NOISE

HowStuffWorks.com compares white noise to a crowded arena where thousands of conversations are taking place at one time. When you first walk inside, sound roars through you as one continuous, blurred sound, and it is impossible for you to separate one conversation from the rest. The sound produced is an example of white noise – an indistinguishable sound that your brain cannot comprehend.

For those who have tried to sleep through the

rest. But by keeping your brain occupied and confused, white noise can help your body fully relax and drift off into a deep sleep.

White noise machines are readily available and usually cost upwards of \$50. However, if you are on a budget, think about your sleeping habits in the summer months. For no additional cost, your fan or air conditioner creates the perfect hum of white noise, and should help you sleep, if nothing else, soundly. ■

## You Snooze, You Lose *continued from page 1*

There are two sides to every story. In this case, the two sides are the hormones leptin and ghrelin. Leptin's main function is to stimulate your level of energy and suppress your appetite by sending a signal to your brain that says, "I'm full!" On the other hand (or hormone), ghrelin stimulates hunger while storing fat. Similar in form but opposite in function, ghrelin is leptin's evil twin when it comes to the battle of the bulge.

The longer  
you sleep  
the more  
fat you burn.

According to WebMD, how much quality sleep you get "may silently orchestrate a symphony of hormonal activity tied to your appetite." Research has determined that an imbalance between ghrelin and leptin occurs when you don't get enough sleep. Ghrelin levels rise as leptin drops, leading to a lack of satisfaction after you eat. This translates into an unnecessary intake of calories, usually consisting of sweets and carbohydrates. But, what your body is craving is not necessarily cake and ice cream, but 7 to 9 hours of quality, uninterrupted sleep. Taking a nap at the beach for an hour just won't cut it.

### BULKING UP ON SLEEP

Guys, you listen up, too! If you are losing out on sleep to spend more time at the gym, STOP! All those reps won't do you much good without sleep, as the best workout tool is not at the gym, but in your bedroom. Pumping iron is certainly a key factor in building lean muscle, but what's more important and less understood is that muscles only fully repair after you have been asleep for an extended period of time. Even the loss of just one hour can significantly decrease results. Keep in mind that in deep sleep, your body uses stored fat to repair muscles. So the longer you sleep the more fat you burn. Now that's a dream come true!

### BE THE BIGGEST "SNOOZER"

By grabbing that iced mocha latte to get moving in the morning and devouring an overload of carbohydrate snacks to beat the midday lull, food is being used to replace sleep. Scientific research proves that by being the biggest snoozer and grabbing more calorie-free Zzzz, you could be well on your way to the slim, summer body you crave.

Now, this scientific research is not providing you with an excuse as to why you are too tired to go to the gym ("I would go, but my ghrelin levels are just way too high today..."), but it is a proven fact that cravings are difficult to control with willpower alone. So think twice about the reason behind why you can't walk past the cookies without grabbing one...or two, and make the right decision - grab one or two hours of extra sleep instead. You have nothing to lose but weight. ■

"The summer night  
is like a  
perfection of thought."

-Wallace Stevens



## PILLOW TALK



## Picking your perfect Pillow

We should all know by now that a comfortable and supportive mattress is essential for tranquil nights and ache-free mornings. But, finding the right pillow is equally important. No matter your preferred sleep position, there's a perfect pillow for you that will keep your neck and shoulders supported, and your spine in line.

### If You're A Back Sleeper...

You should opt for a firmer pillow of medium thickness. The goal in choosing a pillow for you is to make sure your head and shoulders are supported, allowing your neck to rest parallel to the spine. A pillow that's too high or too flat may angle the neck unnaturally, causing strain.

### If You're A Side Sleeper...

A thicker pillow of medium firmness would be a good option. The pillow should be high enough to fill the space between your shoulders and neck, keeping your spine in alignment. Too soft or flat, you may experience pressure on your shoulders.

### If You're A Stomach Sleeper...

The flatter and softer, the better. A flat, squishy pillow will allow the head to rest straight instead of awkwardly to the side, and keep the neck from arching. If you feel neck strain even with a flat pillow, try resting your head directly on the mattress.

Feeling muddled by all the various types of pillows on the market today? Don't be. Take your time going through your options, and remember that your comfort is the surest judge of pillow perfection. ■

WHY YOUR

# Mattress Matters

the more you know, the better you'll sleep

## Is It Time To Replace Your Mattress?

Even though we spend a third of our lives in bed, many of us will keep our existing mattress for long past its intended lifetime before we think about replacing it. An old, low-quality, or poorly fitted mattress can cause sleepless nights, back pain, neck pain, and general daytime crankiness. Plus, if you suffer from allergies, older mattresses filled with allergens will wreak havoc on your nightly breathing.

If you're not sure whether you should be looking to replace your current mattress, see if any of the following fit how you feel about your sleep surface:

### 1. "I'VE OWNED MY MATTRESS FOR LONGER THAN 7 YEARS."

While many still hold onto the traditional 10 to 12-year rule, the Better Sleep Council (BSC) recommends that you replace your mattress every 5 to 7 years. Recent research conducted at Oklahoma State University showed significant health benefits to back pain, sleep quality, and other factors when mattresses were replaced after a 5-year span (*Sleep Savvy*, April 2008).

### 2. "MY MATTRESS IS UNCOMFORTABLE."

You spend a significant amount of your life in bed. If nothing else, your mattress should be comfortable. Discomfort is also a good indication that your mattress isn't offering proper support. When you get into bed, if you're not sighing with relief as all the day's stresses are released from your body, it's time to replace that mattress.

### 3. "I'D LIKE A HIGHER QUALITY SLEEP SURFACE."

Maybe when you bought your current mattress, you went for a low-end clearance model because of a strict

budget, or got an inexpensive hand-me-down from a relative's guest room. If your sleep is suffering, an upgrade might be in order. Nowadays, several mattress retailers are offering high quality brands at reasonable prices. Still in doubt? Considering the cost per night over the next 5 to 7 years may help put things in perspective.

### 4. "MY MATTRESS HAS A BODY IMPRESSION."

Over time, mattresses will naturally conform to the body of the sleeper, leaving shallow body impressions. While this is a natural occurrence for all mattresses, these indentations will eventually become deeper, decreasing support. A mattress that has a body impression deeper than 1.5 inches should be replaced.

### 5. "I SUFFER FROM BACK AND NECK PAIN."

A new mattress could be the best medicine for daytime aches and pains! Research has shown that new bedding can reduce back pain and back stiffness by more than half in just a four-week period (*Sleep Savvy*, May/June 2007).

Today, advancements in sleep technology have given us a variety of sleep surfaces proven to reduce pressure points such as natural latex, memory foam, even spring and foam combos. Try out several different kinds and choose one that makes you say, "ahhh."

### 6. "I'M CONCERNED ABOUT ALLERGIES."

Awful as it sounds, tiny critters called dust mites tend to congregate in mattresses and pillows, chowing down on our sloughed skin cells and hair. While dust mites and their eggs are harmless to most (aside from the obvious ick factor), roughly 10 percent of us have allergies that can be exacerbated by dust mites. In these cases, a new mattress can improve nightly breathing, and in turn, provide more restful sleep. ■

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# ask the Oexpert

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Several studies have recently shown there are many factors like your environment, behavior and your sleep equipment that can cause your sleep to become disrupted. As we age our sleep needs do not change, but our ability to get quality sleep becomes more difficult. Look at your sleep equipment and see if they have kept up with the changes that your body has made over the years. A simple change in your mattress and pillow may be all that you need to start sleeping like you did 20 years ago. ■

**Dr. Robert Oexman**  
Vice President of Strategic Development  
and Research, Sleep To Live

Dr. Oexman oversees the Sleep to Live Institute's research of sleep and how the environment impacts sleep. As a doctor of Chiropractics and member of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, Dr. Oexman lectures on the topic of sleep both in the U.S. and internationally.

**Do you know where the phrase**

## "Goodnight, Sleep Tight"

comes from?

If not, don't lose sleep over it. Etymologists and word-hunters of the English language seem to agree that the definite origins of the phrase are unclear. However, there are some interesting theories.

One popular explanation is that it refers to beds in Shakespearean times. Before spring beds were invented, mattresses were secured to bed frames with criss-crossed ropes that needed to be tightened on occasion. Word expert Michael Quinion, author of [worldwidewords.org](http://worldwidewords.org), is doubtful of this explanation, citing its earliest appearance in print as recent as 1916: "The late date of first appearance of the phrase rather militates against this being the source."

The word historians at [AskOxford.com](http://AskOxford.com) and [WordOrigins.org](http://WordOrigins.org) hold that the word "tight," once used as an adverb meaning soundly or properly, survives in this common bedtime phrase meaning simply, "sleep well."

Sources seem to agree on one thing—the creepy crawly addition of "Don't let the bedbugs bite" to the rhyme did not appear until much later in history. ■

# What's Your Sleep IQ? Test Your Sleep Knowledge

**1) Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) occurs in which of the four seasons?**

- a) Spring    b) Summer    c) Winter    d) Fall

**2) Thanks to the new government effort to conserve energy, Daylight Saving Time occurs:**

- a) one month earlier    b) one week earlier  
c) one month later    d) one week later

**3) Where is the best place for your television to go to ensure the best possible night sleep?**

- a) directly in front of your bed  
b) to the right of your bed  
c) to the left of your bed  
d) None of the above – you should not be watching television in your bedroom

**4) White noise is:**

- a) a combination of all sounds and frequencies  
b) a really quiet sound that cannot be heard by the human ear  
c) the sound of ringing in your ears  
d) a combination of paranormal sounds that interfere with broadcast signals

**5) The most common sleep position is the:**

- a) starfish    b) fetus    c) log    d) soldier

**6) True or False: A new "breathalyzer" has been invented to determine whether someone has been driving while drowsy.**

**7) The softest, flattest pillow is perfect for someone who sleeps on their:**

- a) back    b) side  
c) stomach    d) none of the above

**8) According to the National Sleep Foundation, temperatures above 75 degrees and below 54 degrees:**

- a) are ideal sleep conditions  
b) tend to disturb your sleep  
c) help eliminate snoring  
d) don't make a difference - as long as your mattress is comfortable

**9) If your mattress is uncomfortable, chances are:**

- a) it needs to be cleaned to eliminate the weight of dust mites  
b) you require immediate medical attention  
c) it is not offering proper support  
d) None of the above – it's all in your head

**10) Fill in the blank: \_\_\_\_\_ is the hormone that stimulates hunger.**

- a) serotonin    b) ghrelin  
c) leptin    d) melatonin

## Answers:

- 1: c) Winter  
2: a) One month earlier  
3: d) None of the above  
4: a) A combination of all sounds and frequencies  
5: b) Fetus  
6: False  
7: c) stomach  
8: b) tend to disturb sleep  
9: c) it is not offering the proper support  
10: b) Ghrelin