

Make YOUR BEDROOM healthy

10 TIPS FOR A SNOOZING SANCTUARY THAT TREATS YOU RIGHT

AT A LONG DAY'S END, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE SLIPPING BETWEEN COOL sheets in your own room to restore yourself, mind, body and spirit. But there are potential hazards to your health lurking in the space that claims one-third of your life, experts tell *Morris/Essex Health & Life*. They offer these ways to make sure your bedroom is good for you:

1 BUY SMART. "Green lifestyle" authority Danny Seo, who has written numerous books on eco-friendly design, suggests bedding with natural fibers such as Tencel (made from waste wood pulp) or Modal (made from beech trees); both are free from harmful chemicals and have a silky feel. (You can find the Danny Seo Home line of bedding at stores like Marshalls and HomeGoods.)

Seo also nixes petroleum-based synthetic "memory foam" pillows and mattresses, which can emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can cause headaches;

irritation of the eyes, nose and throat; nausea and other problems. Better bets: 100 percent natural latex or 100 percent organic cotton mattresses and pillows and, if you're not allergic, down pillows. (Find organic mattresses, pillows and bedding at White Lotus in Highland Park and down pillows at Down to Basics in Red Bank.)

2 FIGHT MITES. "Dust mites are ubiquitous, microscopic arachnids that live in our bedding and carpeting and eat the flakes of our skin," says Steven J. Weiss, M.D.,

chief of the Division of Allergy and Clinical Immunology at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, who notes that it is not the bugs we're allergic to, but rather their airborne excrement. Fortunately, there's an easy fix: Placing tightly woven encasement covers on your pillow, mattress and box spring will prevent the excrement from becoming airborne. Seo recommends purchasing dust mite covers that are 100 percent cotton, not PVC- or polyurethane-based. "You don't want the kind that sounds crinkly," he says. Dr.

Weiss recommends washing sheets in "hot, not warm, water" to kill dust mites. Use a vacuum cleaner with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to clean carpets, but leave the room for an hour afterwards because vacuuming will stir up the dust-mite excrement. Because humidity promotes dust-mite replication and mold growth, keep your room at a 35 percent to 45 percent humidity level with an air conditioner or dehumidifier, such as the Bucketless 55-Pint Dehumidifier from Brookstone.

3 KEEP THINGS FRESH. Seo recommends changing pillowcases every couple of days and replacing pillows every two years. If you're not ready to toss yours, stick them in the freezer overnight to kill the allergens.

4 GO GREEN. Research shows that many plants can combat the "offgassing" of potentially harmful elements in the atmosphere that can't be removed in other ways. Try one of these top 10 air scrubbers: areca, lady and bamboo palm; rubber; dracaena; English ivy; dwarf date palm; ficus alii; Boston fern; peace lily.

5 ZAP THE GADGETS. The jury is still out as to whether the electromagnetic fields that emanate from our cell phones and computers cause cancer, but with the National Institute of Environmental Health Science calling for more studies, why take the risk? If you must have electronics in your room, move the charging station as far away from your bed as possible. And consider banning from the bedroom all blue-light-emitting devices (yes, even your TV). Studies show that the blue LEDs can inhibit the production of the sleep hormone melatonin, disturbing your sleep cycle.

6 FENG-SHUI YOUR SPACE. “When you apply feng shui principles to your bedroom, you create a personal paradise, with a *qi*, or energy, that is warm and welcoming,” says Laurie Bornstein, a New Jersey designer who is the CEO of the National Feng Shui Guild. “Put your bed in a ‘command’ position so you are in full view of the space in front of you and have solid support—either a wall or a firm headboard—behind you. Make sure, though, that you are not in direct alignment with your doorway so that the energy coming in the door will not disrupt your sleep pattern. Stagger it a little.” Next, she says, create balance by placing a nightstand with a lamp on each side of your bed. And when it comes to mirrors in the bedroom, the rule is “one or less,” she says, to “bring the energy down,” which relaxes you. Her suggested placement: opposite a window to draw nature in.

7 CHOOSE THE RIGHT HUES. The optimal hues for restful relaxation are ranges of blue (including purple and lavender) and mid-tone earthy colors (sage, beige, creams). “Avoid pastels because pastel ranges are expansive and not intimate,” advises Bornstein. “Likewise, stay away from high-energy colors such as bright yellows, reds and cobalt blue, which bring the room’s energy up—that’s what you don’t want.” Be mindful, too, of the type of paint you use. “The only way you can truly get a healthy paint is to look for ‘zero VOC,’” advises Seo. His pick: Valspar+, found at Lowe’s, which is the only paint that’s zero-VOC and certified by the Allergy and Asthma Foundation due to its resistance to mold growth.

8 NEUTRALIZE NOISE. If you live on a busy street, sounds from outdoors can

make it difficult to fall asleep—and stay that way—for the restorative hours of shut-eye your body needs. A sound machine can block the noise and transport you to a more serene space, piping in soothing sounds like rain or rushing air.

9 LIGHT A CANDLE. This is a subtle one, but you can create instant serenity and do your mental health a

favor by filling the room with a candle’s cozy glow—when you’re awake, of course. “A flickering flame gives the room a soft energy,” says Bornstein. Candles made from 100 percent soy create a glow without the toxins, carcinogens or soot given off by paraffin.

10 SLEEP IN THE DARK. But when it’s time to catch your zzzs, the darker

your room is, the better. Just as LEDs can affect melatonin production, light sneaking in from outside can likewise disturb your sleep patterns. Light-blocking window treatments—roller shades, honeycomb shades and plantation shutters are best—can eliminate up to 99 percent of that pesky outdoor light so that a restful sleep is a reality, not just a dream. —PATTI VERBANAS



The Danny Seo Modal Bedding collection is made from the cellulosic fiber of beech trees.



An organic cotton White Lotus Home mattress topper. LEFT: Vie Luxe’s Eco-Luxe candle blends soy wax and fragrance oils and is finished with a cotton wick.



Valspar+ paint is VOC-free and mold- and mildew-resistant.



The Sharper Image Sound Soother White Noise Machine (and alarm clock) features 20 nature sounds.

