

Parsley Health

A close-up photograph of a person's feet sticking out from under a white sheet on a bed. The bed is covered with a pink blanket. The feet are positioned in the center of the frame, with the toes pointing towards the right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white and pink.

Our Simple Guide To Healthy Sleep

▶ Learn more at parsleyhealth.com



Letter from Dr. Berzin

Hi! I'm Robin Berzin, MD, the founder and CEO of Parsley Health. Parsley Health is the only primary care medical practice with a whole-body approach, combining nutrition, lifestyle, and cutting-edge medical testing.

I'm glad you're interested in learning more about how you can optimize your sleep and get back to feeling like the best version of yourself. At Parsley, we frequently see members with insomnia, fatigue, and other sleep conditions. In this guide you'll learn everything you need about the science of sleep and how to have a more restful night.

In good health,
Robin Berzin, MD



The science of sleep

Sleep is the ultimate health hack. With a connection to almost every one of your body's systems, getting a good—or bad—night of sleep will have an effect on everything from how your body processes food to how it regulates blood sugar, remembers information, controls inflammation and more. Sleep deprivation has been studied to increase our risk of developing chronic diseases like obesity, heart disease, cancer, arthritis, overactive thyroid, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease. In fact, sleep deprivation is found to increase your risk of developing **heart disease by 48 percent**, make you **four times more likely to get a cold** and **triple your risk for type 2 diabetes**. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Sleep is essential to your body's recovery and ability to keep functioning every day. During the day, your levels of adenosine—a neurotransmitter that transfers energy and signals throughout the body—rise, inhibiting your central nervous system function and contributing to the feeling of tiredness and sluggishness you feel at the end of a long day. While you sleep, the adenosine is broken down, lowering these levels and giving you more energy. Basically, this process makes you to feel re-energized and allows your central nervous system to resume normal function, so when you don't get enough sleep, it can impact any system in your body.

Quality vs. Quantity

The **quality of your sleep actually matters just as much as quantity**, if not more. Even if you sleep 8 hours, if the quality of your sleep suffers it will still have a negative impact on your long-term health. If you stay up for hours counting sheep, feel restless throughout the night or wake up in the earliest hours of the morning, you are probably not getting all the benefits of your 8 hours. Quality sleep means your body cycles through all four stages of sleep (your non-REM stages marked by falling asleep, light sleep, deep sleep and then REM sleep) at least five times. Each stage has a different function—for example, in your third stage of non-REM sleep, your brain waves slow and blood is redirected from your brain to your muscles, allowing your body to heal and repair itself. Allowing your body to cycle through each stage in full is extremely important to having a truly restful night.



NREM STAGE 1

- Transition period between wakefulness and sleep
- Lasts 5-10 min



NREM STAGE 2

- Body temperature drops
- Heart rate slows
- Brain produces sleep spindles
- Lasts 20 min



NREM STAGE 3

- Muscles relax
- Blood pressure and breathing rate drop
- Deepest sleep occurs



REM SLEEP

- Brain becomes more active
- Body becomes more relaxed and immobilized
- Dreams occur
- Eyes move rapidly



Timing matters

What time you go to sleep makes a difference. Whether you consider yourself a night owl or an early lark, the biochemistry doesn't lie. Studies show that our bodies repair the most between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. Even if you get 8 hours of sleep, it is not as restorative if you sleep midnight to 8 a.m. versus 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. This is because as your body cycles through the different stages of sleep, it's shifting between non-REM and REM sleep. During the earlier hours of the night, your body spends more time in non-REM sleep, which is the deepest stage of sleep when your body restores and recovers. As the night goes on, the length of non-REM sleep decreases, while the length of REM sleep increases. So the later you're getting

to bed, the more your body is focused on lighter, less restful REM sleep.

In addition to these short term effects, getting less non-REM deep sleep can impact your long term health. While you sleep, a plumbing system called the glymphatic system opens up between the brain cells and literally flushes out toxic molecules involved in neurodegenerative disorders. The decrease of non-REM sleep as you age **has been shown to** impair the function of the glymphatic system, contributing to heightened risk of Alzheimer's.

Does this mean you can never party or stay up late with family or friends? Of course not, but consistency is the king (size bed) of it all.



How to
have your best
sleep ever—
every night

Set a consistent bedtime

Count backwards from the time you need to get up in the morning by 7.5 hrs. This amounts to five 90-minute sleep cycles—the ideal amount for a good night's sleep. Now add 1 hour to that. It should be around 8 or 9 p.m. This is your ideal time to start your new bedtime ritual. So if you need to wake up at 6:00 a.m., set your bedtime alarm for 9:30 p.m. to make sure you are asleep by 10:30 p.m.





Make a caffeine curfew

Caffeine isn't necessarily a bad thing, in fact, caffeinated tea and coffee consumption has been found to reduce risk of [heart disease](#) and [type 2 diabetes](#). But you do need to be smarter about how you consume it—and how much you consume—if you have sleep issues. If you have adrenal fatigue or issues with your stress hormones, it might be best to give yourself a caffeine break.

The problem with caffeine occurs when we consume it too late in the day and it continues to stimulate us when we should be going to sleep. Caffeine is a similar shape and size as adenosine—the neurotransmitter that builds up throughout the day and tells our brain we're tired.

This allows it to bind to our brain's receptors, keeping our body from realizing that it's tired. So if your caffeine is still being processed in the evening, it's unlikely you'll wind down in time for a good night of rest.

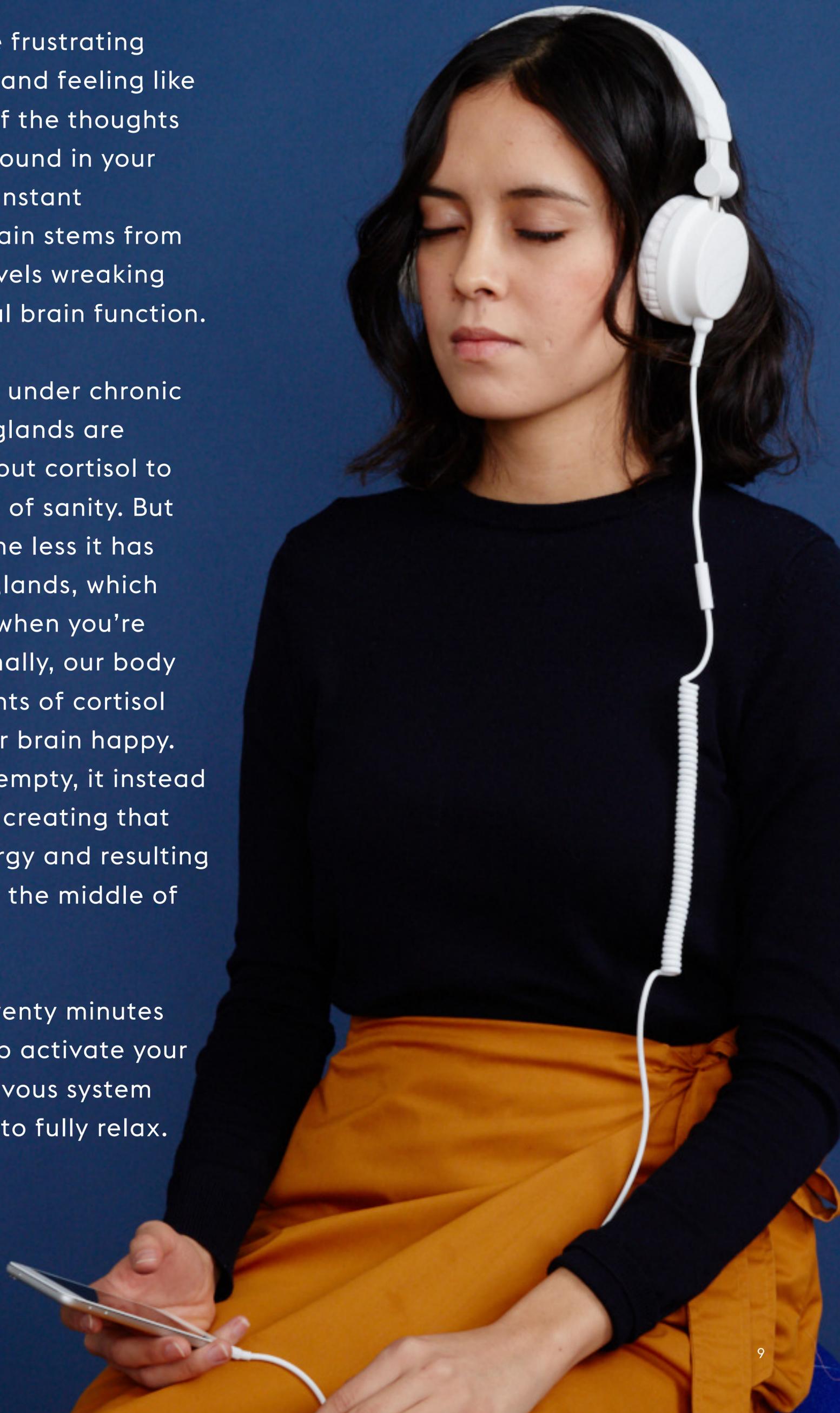
Coffee has a half-life of about 5-7 hours depending on your metabolism. If you have your last cup before noon then it should be out of your system by the time you are ready to hit the sheets. For example, one to two cups of coffee contains about 200 mg of caffeine. If you drink a cup of coffee at noon, you still have 100 mg in your body at 6 p.m. Add another 5 hrs and it's 11 p.m.—way past the time you should be winding down.

Turn your brain off

There's nothing more frustrating than laying and bed and feeling like you just can't shut off the thoughts that are bouncing around in your head. Most of this constant movement in your brain stems from stress and cortisol levels wreaking havoc on your normal brain function.

When you have been under chronic stress, your adrenal glands are constantly pumping out cortisol to maintain some sense of sanity. But the more it pumps, the less it has left in your adrenal glands, which becomes a problem when you're trying to sleep. Normally, our body releases small amounts of cortisol overnight to keep our brain happy. When this reserve is empty, it instead relies on adrenaline, creating that surge of restless energy and resulting in sweaty pajamas in the middle of the night.

Try meditating for twenty minutes at night. This will help activate your parasympathetic nervous system and allow your body to fully relax.





Try these tips for when you can't turn your brain off.

1. Whip up a cup of our Upgraded Golden Milk Latte with your favorite nut milk.
2. Take a warm bath with lavender essential oil and Epsom salts.
3. Read 10 pages of the most boring book you can find in your house.
4. Do some restorative yoga poses on your back like Savasana.
5. Try journaling for at least 10 minutes at night. One recent study found that people who write to-do lists before going to bed fall asleep 9 minutes faster on average than people who wrote about their day.



Upgraded Golden Milk Latte

1. 1 chamomile tea bag
2. ½ cup unsweetened vanilla almond milk
3. 1 tbsp. turmeric powder
4. 1-2 tsp. manuka honey
5. 1 tbsp. unrefined coconut butter
6. 1 tbsp. tocos powder (optional)
7. 1 tbsp. collagen powder (optional)

Steep tea bag in hot water for 5 minutes.
Pour tea into blender with other ingredients.
Blend for 15 seconds, pour, and enjoy.





Try melatonin

Melatonin isn't the answer for everyone, but it can help many regulate their body's naturally occurring systems. This hormone is produced by the pineal gland—a pea-sized gland in the middle of our brain—and regulates our circadian rhythm to fall in line with the natural dark/light cycles of the sun. When the sun goes down, our pineal gland gets turned on and melatonin levels rise to make you sleepy.

However, when you are exposed to a lot of light, this tricks the brain into thinking it is still daytime. That's why you don't get sleepy when you're on your tablet or watching TV. The blue light emitted from electronic devices suppresses our natural production of melatonin. So even if we know we are tired and need to go to sleep, our brain is getting the opposite message.

Many people turn to supplemented melatonin to help their body realize it's time to sleep, but some may be wary of trying melatonin due to side effects, which include:

- Morning drowsiness
- Vivid dreams
- Small changes in blood pressure

However, these usually occur because the dosage is too high. You only need tiny doses to support your natural sleep cycle. As little as 1-3 mg about an hour before you go to bed can boost your melatonin by 20 times.

If melatonin still doesn't work for you, you should discuss other potential underlying causes with your doctor.



The supplement that can help you rest easy

An estimated **30 percent of adults** are deficient in magnesium, yet is one of the most influential and essential minerals for overall health. It's responsible for over 600 enzymatic reactions that allow things like energy metabolism and protein synthesis to occur. But importantly, magnesium can help us slow down and sleep better by increasing GABA, a neurotransmitter that promotes relaxation and sleep. **Studies** have shown that magnesium supplementation improves insomnia and overall sleep quality. So if you can't sleep, try adding a **magnesium glycinate supplement** to your daily routine or take a hot Epsom salt—aka Magnesium Sulphate—bath to help your muscles relax.

A close-up, soft-focus photograph of a person sleeping in a bed. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with a red floral pattern on the cuffs. They are covered by a white quilted blanket. A teal-colored pillow is visible on the left side of the frame. The background is a neutral, light-colored wall.

Create a Sleep Oasis



Design a space that you love

Your sleep oasis should make you feel nothing but joy. Soft, ambient lighting, live plants, or any other decor you love can make a huge difference in how peaceful you feel in the space. Try painting your walls a color that makes you feel relaxed. In particular blue, yellow and green are often associated with calmness and relaxation. Clearing your room of clutter can also relieve stress in the bedroom. It may seem daunting now, but getting organized and making a point to keep your space clear will make all the difference in your ability to fall asleep.

Fine tune your sleep environment

The best environment for sleep is cool, quiet, and dark. Check for and remove distractions — light, heat, noise, or other things that may cause stress. Consider adding ear plugs, blackout curtains, or white noise to your bedroom. Ditching all electronics for 2 hours (ideally) or at the very least 30 minutes prior to bed helps as well.

Your mattress matters

All mattresses are not created equal. The mattress you sleep on is one of the most important factors in getting a good night's sleep. Here are some tips to find the right mattress for you.

Brand doesn't matter. All mattresses essentially come from the same manufacturer. What differs is the price for a certain label. In terms of how it affects your sleep, the brand name is irrelevant.

Discover your preferences. Some like it firm, some like it soft, some like it in-between. Determining which level of firmness is most comfortable to you is essential to your sleep quality. Many brands offer 30 day free trials, so don't be afraid to test it out first.

Beware of toxins. Many mattresses are full of toxic chemicals like polyurethane foam, formaldehyde, boric acid, antimony (a heavy metal similar to arsenic) and worst of all, polybrominated diphenyl ethers (also known as flame retardants)—all bad news for your sleep, health and hormones. Look for GOTS- Global Organic Textile Standard and GOALS - Global Organic Latex Standard to avoid chemicals.



Learn to love lavender

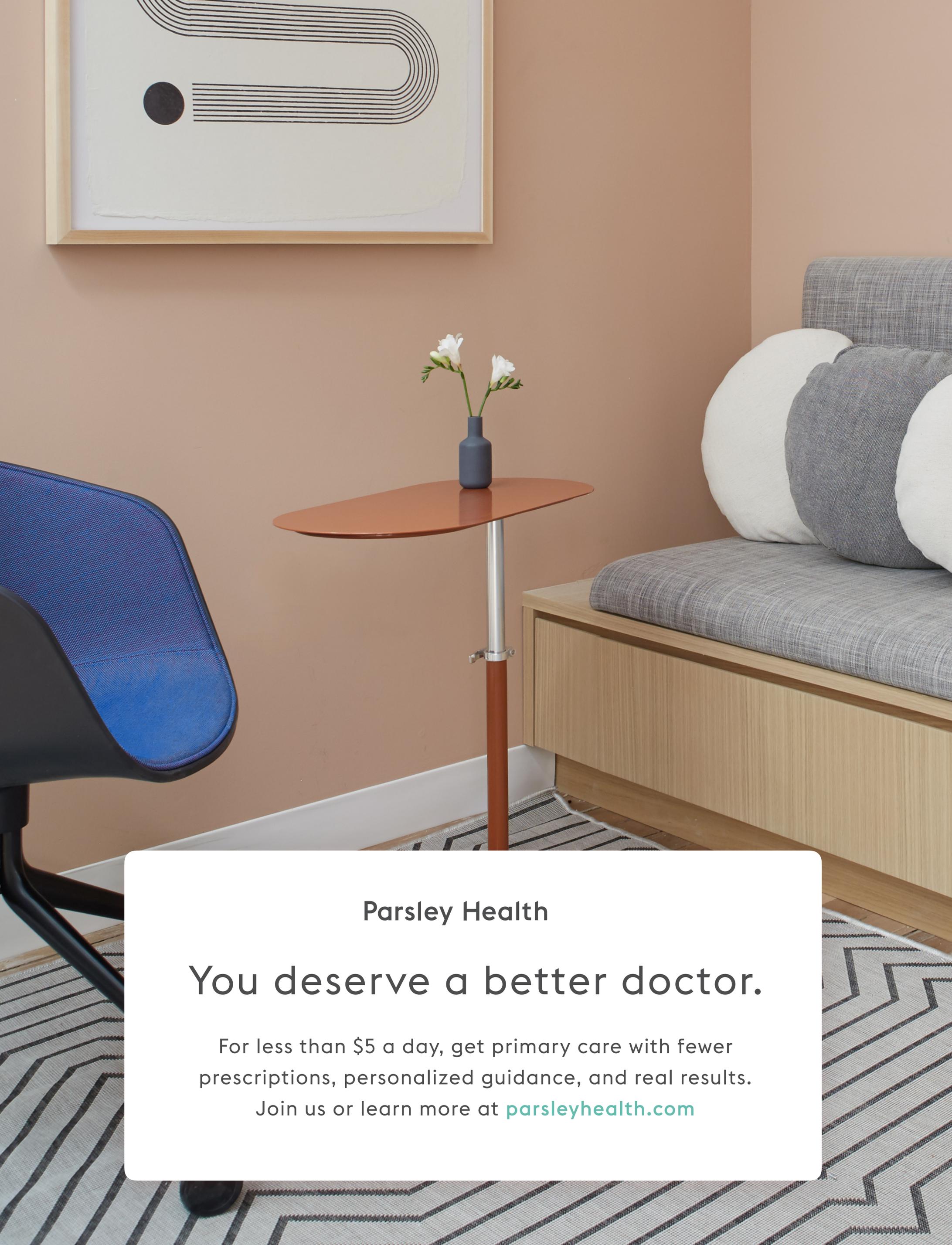
If you have trouble relaxing when you do get in bed, finding the perfect hacks for settling down can be really helpful. Essential oils are known to have many benefits, sleep included. Specifically, lavender **has been shown to** have calming effects, so it's no wonder it does the trick when you can't get to sleep. **One study** found that lavender increased the amount of slow-wave, deep sleep (that stage 3 non-REM sleep) in participants, making them feel more energized the next day. Try opting for a lavender essential oil or room spray to create an atmosphere that helps you rest.

Keep cool overnight

Ideal air temperature for healthy sleep is 60 - 67 degrees. Choosing the right bedspread can help regulate temperature. Cotton both traps heat and lets cool air pass through in the summer, making it a great choice for any climate or time of year. Bamboo blends have also become popular in recent years since bamboo is sustainable, naturally antimicrobial, and sips up moisture. As for your sheets, linen is a better option than satin, since it wicks away rather than trapping heat.



Sleep sets the foundation for almost every other aspect of your health. Getting enough good quality sleep at the right time can be the difference between feeling your best and feeling foggy, depressed, or even downright sick. We hope we've helped you understand why and how to get your best night's sleep, so you can live your healthiest life. If you're still struggling to sleep, you may need long term adrenal and neurotransmitter support to teach your body how to relax. At Parsley Health we address these types of complicated cases every day. Reach out to a doctor if you have more questions about optimizing your sleep. ■



Parsley Health

You deserve a better doctor.

For less than \$5 a day, get primary care with fewer prescriptions, personalized guidance, and real results.

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