THE REST OF THE WORLD

Why women in other countries sleep deeper and longer than we do—and how you can follow their snooze cues. BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY

ONE NIGHT YOU'RE STARING at the ceiling for an hour, willing your eyelids to feel heavy. The next you conk out immediately—only to wake up and see the numbers 4-0-0 glowing on your alarm clock. Sound familiar?

Sadly, it's the status quo for American women, 67 percent of whom report trouble sleeping multiple times a week, according to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF). But not all members of the fairer sex wage this battle: In its most recent international poll, the NSF found that our counterparts in Mexico, Germany, the U.K. and Canada doze regularly—and with relative ease. Women in America? We're sleeping an average 30 to 40 minutes less per night than our peers abroad.

We looked at the data and tapped experts to find out what foreigners are doing differently and why it works. Read on and slumber soundly (at last!).

UNITED KINGDOM

We might poke fun at the Brits' tea habit, but 43 percent of the population consume a heated beverage before crawling under the covers—and they average 18 more minutes of sleep nightly than we do. New York City sleep specialist Allen A. Towfigh, M.D., acknowledges that while the comforting nature of toasty drinks may play a role, a deeper biological mechanism could also be at work: "An animal study showed that warming a part of the brain called the preoptic anterior hypothalamus induces sleep, and this part of a human brain sits close to the roof of the mouth," he says. "Warm beverages may trigger receptors in the region and set off a chemical cascade that promotes sleep."

To try this strategy, stick to one cup of chamomile or other noncaffeinated quaff half an hour before bedtime, says Towfigh. And there's no need to finish the entire cup: "You don't want to wake up to go to the bathroom because you drank too much tea," says Russell Rosenberg, Ph.D., a member of the NSF's expert poll panel.

Not into hot sips? You could also sleep in the buff, to which 30 percent of English respondents attribute their stellar shut-eye. (And you thought those Brits were buttoned-up!) "This idea has yet to be scientifically studied, but the increased comfort associated with being naked may help," says Towfigh. And if it keeps you up with your delighted partner, nothin' wrong with that! »

GLOBE: SAMXMEG; TEACUP: CLAIRE CORDIER

American women average **6 HOURS AND 31 MINUTES** of sleep per night, despite needing an average **7 HOURS AND 13 MINUTES** to function at their best.

MEXICO

You might think of India when you hear the word "meditate," but it's a common practice closer to home—62 percent of Mexicans (versus 47 percent of Americans) engage in quiet reflection or prayer in the hour before sleep, the NSF survey reveals. It's a custom that other nationalities don't follow nearly enough, according to Rosenberg. "We know how important it is to take a moment at the end of the day to unwind," he says. "It helps prevent us from bringing the weight of the current day—or the next day—to bed with us."

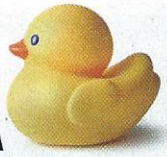
The optimal time to pray or meditate is 30 minutes before hitting the mattress so you don't rush the process. Choose a location away from your bed to prevent yourself from subconsciously connecting it with the topics you're contemplating, Rosenberg says. He adds that *what* you mull over is important too. "Focus on being thankful rather than on the resolution of problems," says Rosenberg. "For example, praying for someone to recover from an illness or for insight into a problem is unlikely to calm you." Weighty matters can pull you down a rabbit hole that only leads to Insomnia Central, so save pondering them for waking hours.

Come morning, do your mom proud and make the bed. Eighty-two percent of Mexicans report practicing the habit daily and changing the sheets more than once a week, which could contribute to the additional 35 minutes of snoozing they log. Turning down the covers or putting on new linens may promote a more relaxing environment needed to catch those z's, Towfigh says.

GERMANY

An astounding 90 percent of Germans say it's the pleasant aroma of their bedroom, which they air out once a week, that helps lull them to sleep. "Scent plays a powerful role in relaxation and memory-building," says David Cloud, CEO of the NSF. But there's no one-smell-fits-all sleep solver, according to Rosenberg. "Scent is tied to emotion, and that's very personal," he says. "Fragrances that help you feel calm without overpowering your room are best." (Interestingly, lavender and jasmine essences—frequently touted for their calming properties—were least popular with our friends in Deutschland.)

Whatever scent makes you drowsy, send it into the air with reed diffusers, potpourri, sachets and other nonelectric aromatic tools (risky burning candles won't increase your peace of mind). Keep the smell limited to your bedroom to enhance its power; you'll subconsciously equate one whiff of it with dozing off.



CANADA

Our neighbors to the north don't need to count sheep—or moose, for that matter—to achieve a restorative night. In fact, Canada came in No. 1 as well-rested champs, with 84 percent of residents saying they fall asleep quickly at least a few evenings a week. (No wonder they're all so absurdly nice!) Part of their success seems to lie in temperature regulation. Half of Canadians take a bath before bed, a warming move that induces a temperature drop that eventually triggers sleep. The key is to keep the water below 104°F and time your dip for an hour or two before you hit the sack. Other researchers have found a connection between cold feet and difficulty nodding off—not a problem for the one in five Canadians who wear socks to bed (the most of all countries in the poll).

So, catching 40 winks could come down to sleeping in your birthday suit and fuzzy socks? It might look silly, but you'll be too busy dreaming to care.

THREE SURPRISING SLEEP SABOTEURS

Look around your bedroom—one of these mainstays could be what's keeping you from your date with Mr. Sandman.

YOUR PILLOWS

Can't get comfy, no matter which type you try? Ten percent of sound sleepers in Mexico forgo putting a cushion under their heads.

YOUR OPAQUE WINDOW COVERINGS

Contrary to what you might think, blackout curtains and darkening shades could be messing with your sleep. More than a third of respondents in Germany and Mexico go to bed with their shades or blinds open. Russell Rosenberg, Ph.D., investigator at NeuroTrials Research, says this could help maintain the body's natural circadian rhythm.

YOUR CLOCK

You know what time the alarm is set for, so there's no good reason to have the numbers positioned toward you, Rosenberg says. Turning the device around prevents you from fixating on the hour when you're trying to snooze.

DIFFUSER: ORESTE GASPARI; DUCK: FLOORTJE; ROCKS: JODY DOLE