How Much Sleep Do Runners Need?

As a runner, you're likely diligent about hitting the roads every week, but what about hitting the hay?

We sought the advice of sleep and athletic performance experts to find out how much sleep you should get, why runners need more than a typical adult, and what you can do to improve your snooze.

## **Understand That You Do Need More Sleep**

The physical stress of running means you probably need more shut-eye than someone who likes to lounge. The body needs time to repair itself after a strenuous effort, and that [recovery process occurs during sleep](https://www.active.com/fitness/articles/the-11-best-mattresses-for-athletes).

"One study found that athletes slept longer for four days after a marathon compared to before the race," says Dr. Amy Bender, a sleep scientist at the Centre for Sleep & Human Performance in Calgary. "The athletes were not fully recovered after just one night of extra sleep."

Both quality and quantity count when it comes to sleep.

Bender, whose research focuses on sleep and athletic performance, noticed this herself after she completed an IRONMAN competition.

"I slept about two hours more a night for about a week straight," she says.

In general, adults should aim to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night, but Bender advises elite athletes (that's you, right?) to catch Z's for at least 8 to 10 hours.

Experts say both quality and quantity count when it comes to sleep. So, how do you know if you’ve had a good night's sleep?

"You should feel refreshed and energized when you wake up." says Cheri Mah, a research fellow at the University of California San Francisco Human Performance Center and advisor to elite athletes on sleep.

"You should not need to rely on regular naps or significant consumption of caffeine or other stimulants to remain alert during the day," she adds.

## **Embrace the Power Nap**

Naps are not a replacement for adequate sleep at night but can give you a boost in alertness and energy before a workout or competition.

Be sure, however, to avoid napping longer than 30 minutes, or risk what's called "sleep inertia," a lingering groggy feeling after you wake up, experts say.

Prioritize sleep with the same level of consistency and attention to detail that you pay your runs.

## **Make Sleep a Priority**

Rest should be a critical component of a runner’s training. That consistent schedule for your runs should also apply to sleep.

"Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day and avoid social jet lag on the weekend—going to bed later and waking up later," Mah says.

Easily lose track of time in the evening? Mah suggests setting an alarm on your phone 30 minutes before your scheduled bedtime so you know to start winding down.

## **Develop Good Habits**

Say good night early to social media.

"Using an electronic device for even as little as 30 minutes before bedtime has been shown to negatively impact sleep quality by reducing and delaying [melatonin](https://www.active.com/nutrition/articles/best-melatonin)," Bender says. "Even if you don't think it affects you, the research shows it does."

Avoid caffeine late in the day and alcohol, which might help you fall asleep, but will disrupt your sleep later in the night. Creating a sleep-friendly environment is also important.

"Make your bedroom like a cave—dark, quiet, [cool](https://www.active.com/fitness/articles/the-best-cooling-mattresses-for-active-people), and comfortable," says Mah. Use black-out curtains and a [white noise device](https://www.active.com/fitness/articles/best-white-noise-machines) or fan to minimize outside light and sound. Wear earplugs if you need to. Make sure your sleeping surface is comfortable and don't watch TV or do office work in your bedroom. Establish a relaxing routine—like reading or doing yoga—before you snap off the lights.

In general, just be sure to prioritize sleep with the same level of consistency and attention to detail that you pay for your runs. Before long you’ll notice that great sleep will lead to great runs.

Sweet dreams!