



EVENING GUIDE · WIND DOWN

# How to breathe easier in dry winter air and fall asleep faster

For light sleepers who wake stuffy or too warm and keep a gadget on the nightstand. After reading, you will be able to set bedroom humidity, keep equipment clean, and time warmth and cooling for easier nights.

- **Humidity target**  
Keep bedroom air near 30 to 50 percent, lower in deep winter.
- **Clean tank**  
Daily drying and regular cleaning keep mist from turning musty.
- **Warm cue**  
A warm bath one to two hours before bed supports faster sleep onset.

By Tara Whelan · Updated Jul 17, 2026 · 10 min read

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The night often turns on small things. A dry throat at lights out. A room that feels sticky or cold. A bath taken too close to bed. Once bedroom air and body heat are tuned, breathing feels easier and sleep tends to come sooner.

01

Set your humidity target and measure it

Most guidance settles around the same middle ground. Carrier recommends maintaining indoor humidity between 30% and 50% to balance comfort, indoor air quality and home protection. The EPA recommends keeping indoor relative humidity below 60%, ideally between 30% and 50%, to help control mold and moisture.

The exact best number inside that range is not settled. Some allergy guidance leans a little higher, which is worth knowing if dust mites trouble you. Ideal ranges differ slightly, with 30 to 50 percent advised generally and 40 to 50 percent advised for allergy control.

Season shifts the target. For winter, Carrier recommends targeting about 30% to 40% indoor humidity, with lower settings if outdoor temperatures fall below 10F to prevent window condensation. For summer comfort, Carrier notes a target around 40% to 45% within the overall 30% to 50% range. Cold outdoor air holds little moisture, so heated winter air can feel parched. Warm season air can hold more moisture, so the same room may feel close.

Learn what each edge feels like. “When humidity is too low, the air feels drier than it really is, which can lead to dry skin, irritated sinuses, and even increased static electricity,” says Kevin Dickson, president of Energy Services Air Conditioning, Heating and Electrical. Hear Kevin Dickson describe how air feels sticky and uncomfortable when humidity is too high, and excess moisture creates a breeding ground for mold, mildew, and dust mites. Low humidity can make a cool room feel colder. High humidity can make a warm room feel warmer.

How to measure

Mayo Clinic advises measuring home humidity with a hygrometer and considering a humidifier with a built in hygrometer called a humidistat. EPA guidance advises adjusting humidity to 30 to 50 percent, using a moisture gauge, opening windows when outdoor air is dry, and using

exhaust fans and air conditioning to lower moisture.

Place a small hygrometer near the bed, away from direct mist, an open window, or a heat vent. Check it at the hour before bed and again at first light for a few nights. A humidistat on the device can switch mist on and off near your set point, though a separate gauge helps confirm the reading.

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## 02

# Choose the right device for dry or damp seasons

Dry winter air and damp summer air call for opposite tools. In heated winter rooms, added moisture may help some people with dry sinuses and stuffy noses. In humid weather or small damp bedrooms, removing moisture often matters more.

Mayo Clinic states humidifier types include central humidifiers, ultrasonic humidifiers, impeller humidifiers, evaporators and steam vaporizers. A central humidifier connects to heating and cooling and serves the whole home. An ultrasonic model uses vibration to make a fine cool mist. An impeller model uses a spinning disk to throw a cool mist into the air. An evaporator blows air through a wet wick or filter. A steam vaporizer heats water and releases warm steam.

Portable units suit one bedroom. Whole home options suit persistent dryness through the house. Mayo Clinic advises not to buy a steam vaporizer if you have children because hot water inside may cause burns if spilled. Households with curious toddlers often rest easier with a cool mist model placed out of reach.

When air already feels damp, Mayo Clinic states central or window mounted air conditioning units dry the air and dehumidifiers collect extra moisture without a cooling effect. Use kitchen and bath exhaust fans during cooking and showering, then let them run a little longer. Open windows when outdoor air is dry and fresh, as EPA guidance notes.

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### FROM THE EDITORS

For the night air itself, medical research summarized by Trane points to sixty to sixty seven degrees for adults and sixty five to seventy degrees for babies. The Sleep Foundation rule summarized by Trane is to keep the bedroom two to five degrees cooler than the daytime rooms, so the cool settles in softly as the lamp stays on.

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## 03

### Clean to prevent mold, bacteria and white dust

Clean equipment matters as much as the setting. AAAAI advises cleaning and changing the humidifier filter on a regular basis per manufacturer instructions so mold does not grow and blow into the home. Still water, warmth, and mineral scale invite growth.

Make the routine simple enough to keep. An asthma guide advises emptying and drying the humidifier tank daily and cleaning the tank thoroughly every 3 days with white vinegar or hydrogen peroxide, avoiding harsh chemical cleaners. Each morning, pour out leftover water, rinse, and let the tank air dry with the cap off. Every few days, clean according to the manual, then rinse well and dry.

Water choice changes what leaves the nozzle. AAAAI states if possible use distilled or demineralized water because minerals in tap water can increase bacteria growth, white dust and sinus irritation. That pale dust on the nightstand comes from minerals in hard tap water. People with tender sinuses often notice it first.

Method matters for safety. The same mold prevention guide lists 1 teaspoon of 3% hydrogen peroxide per 1 gallon of distilled water as a budget option, and weekly soaking in 1:1 warm water and white vinegar while unplugged. A mold prevention guide advises never running white vinegar, essential oils or bleach through an active humidifier tank because aerosolized acid and chlorine can irritate airways. Soak while the unit is off and unplugged, rinse fully, then refill with fresh water before running.

Watch the room, not only the tank. Control condensation on windows, walls, and floors by lowering the set point, adding brief ventilation, or pausing the unit. Winter guidance warns that high settings can wet cold windowpanes. Damp sills and musty cloth are signals to dry the air and clean.

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## 04

### Protect allergies and asthma while you humidify

Dry air can scratch. Damp air can grow things that provoke. AAAAI advises keeping house humidity between 40-50% and monitoring levels with a hygrometer because dust mites grow best where there is moisture. A winter asthma guide advises keeping home humidity below 50% and keeping the humidifier clean because high humidity promotes mold and dust mites.

The biology explains the narrow window. Dust mites thrive at humidity at and above 70 percent, especially at 20-25 degrees Celsius, and lowering relative humidity below 60 percent can reduce dust mites. Mold growth is ideal at 70 percent humidity, although mold can grow above 55 percent. Staying near 30 to 50 percent, and never above 60 percent, supports comfort while limiting growth.

Humidifiers may soothe dry sinuses and stuffy noses but there is no medical record that they alleviate asthma and they may worsen symptoms if dirty or overused. Dry air can irritate nose, throat, and lungs in sensitive sleepers. Moist, dirty mist can carry mold and bacteria that worsen cough or wheeze. Talk to a health professional before use if asthma, allergy, or frequent sinus infection is part of your nights.

Small bedroom habits support the setting. Use dust mite covers, wash sheets in hot water, vacuum with attention to rugs and vents, change heating and cooling filters as directed, and keep pets out of the bedroom if sensitive. If cough, wheeze, or morning congestion appears after starting humidity, pause use, clean, lower the target, and seek advice.

#### FROM THE EDITORS

Whether humidifiers improve asthma outcomes, and which device type is best for asthma, is not established. Keep asthma and allergy safety central and let symptoms and a hygrometer guide adjustments.

## 05

### Use warm baths and showers as a sleep cue

Warm water before bed works through cooling after. A warm bath or shower lifts skin temperature. In the hour or two that follow, hands and feet release heat, core temperature falls, and drowsiness often rises. The long exhale toward sleep has a thermal shape.

Timing and dose come from proxy trials and home studies rather than large insomnia trials. A meta-analysis summary reports water at 104 to 108.5F for as little as 10 minutes, taken 1 to 2 hours before bed, was linked to better sleep quality and shorter time to fall asleep. A 2021 study in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine in 1,094 older adults found bathing 61-120 and 121-180 minutes before bed linked to shorter actigraphic and self reported sleep onset and higher distal proximal skin temperature gradient by about 0.49C and 0.51C. A home study of 2,252 older Japanese adults found hot bathing linked to 1.3 percentage points higher sleep efficiency, 3.3 fewer minutes awake at night and about 27% lower odds of rating sleep as poor.

Passive heating trials are mostly small, specific groups or observational home studies, so timing and dose for insomnia are still uncertain. Foot baths may help a little but current pooled evidence is low quality and not statistically significant compared with full baths. Treat the bath as a gentle cue that may help some people, not a promise.

## A calm way to try it

Finish a bath or warm shower 1 to 2 hours before bed rather than just before lights out. Aim for water around 104 to 108.5F for at least 10 minutes, as tolerated. Then move to a cool bedroom and light bedding so heat can leave through hands and feet. A full bath appears better supported than a foot bath alone.

Keep safety close. Test water before stepping in, keep bathrooms slip safe, and avoid very hot water if pregnant, dizzy, or living with heart or blood pressure concerns without medical advice. Older adults and children need care around hot water and steam, including steam vaporizers left running nearby. If heat leaves you wired rather than drowsy, try a shorter soak or an earlier finish time.

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## 06

### Cool the bedroom and choose breathable bedding

Cool air pairs with warm skin. Medical research summarized by Trane reports the best sleep temperature is 60 to 67F for adults and 65 to 70F for babies. The Sleep Foundation rule summarized by Trane is to make nighttime temperature 2-5 degrees cooler than daytime or evening temperature.

Start near that range, then adjust for blankets and pajamas. Keep the bedroom cool at night, about 60 to 67 F for adults, with bedding 2 to 5 degrees cooler than daytime. Choose cool breathable bedding, dark and quiet conditions, and programmable or smart thermostats with humidity sensing. A lamp left low, shades drawn, and street light blocked helps the cool hush hold.

How bedding fabrics compare for sleep onset and breathing comfort is not detailed. Choose what lets heat escape and feels soft against the nose and mouth. Wash bedding often in allergy seasons. Adjust for babies, who need a warmer room range of 65 to 70F, with safe sleep guidance from a pediatric professional.

Air conditioning season needs its own balance. Cooling dries the air, which can ease sticky nights but leave morning throats dry. If the room falls below 30 percent, add a small amount of clean humidity or widen ventilation. If windows sweat or cloth smells musty, lower moisture with exhaust fans, air conditioning, or a dehumidifier. The hygrometer on the nightstand keeps both seasons honest.

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## 07

### The checklist

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- ☐ Place a hygrometer near the bed and check it before sleep
  - ☐ Hold bedroom humidity near 30 to 50 percent, never above 60
  - ☐ Lower winter setting toward 30 to 40 percent to protect windows
  - ☐ Aim near 40 to 45 percent for summer comfort when damp
  - ☐ Empty and air dry the tank each morning
  - ☐ Clean the tank every 3 days and descale weekly unplugged
  - ☐ Fill with distilled or demineralized water where possible
  - ☐ Change filters and wicks as the manual directs
  - ☐ Take a warm bath or shower 1 to 2 hours before bed
  - ☐ Keep the adult bedroom near 60 to 67 F with breathable bedding
  - ☐ Run bath and kitchen fans to move moist air out
  - ☐ Pause and clean if mist smells musty or symptoms rise
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## 08

### Sources and further reading

- What Humidity Should My House Be At? Ideal Indoor Humidity Guide · [carrier.com](https://carrier.com)
- Humidifiers and Indoor Allergies AAAAI · [aaaai.org](https://aaaai.org)
- Hot-water bathing before bedtime and shorter sleep onset latency are accompanied by a higher distal-proximal skin temperature gradient in ol · [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- Humidifiers: Ease skin, breathing symptoms · [mayoclinic.org](https://mayoclinic.org)
- Does a Warm Shower or Bath Before Bed Help You Sleep? · [drkumardiscovery.com](https://drkumardiscovery.com)
- Care for Your Air: A Guide to Indoor Air Quality US EPA · [epa.gov](https://epa.gov)
- Indoor humidity levels - Sensitive Choice · [sensitivechoice.com](https://sensitivechoice.com)

For information only, not medical advice. Ongoing trouble sleeping, loud snoring with pauses in breathing, or low mood that lingers deserves a doctor's attention, and supplements can interact with medication.



WRITTEN BY

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