CUADERNO DE IDEAS

Sleeping Well in December: 7 Science-Backed Hab

Alimentación y bienestar · 25/11/2026 · Por Camilo Calderón

Novenas, parties, late nights and upside-down schedules: December throws sleep off. Here are 7 simple, science-backed habits to rest better during the season and recover when you stay up late.

December in Colombia runs on its own clock: novenas at seven, gatherings that go on and on, the party that ends at one in the morning, trips, the 24th, the 31st. It's a beautiful season, but it's also when sleep gets most out of order. And sleep isn't a luxury: according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, an adult needs seven hours or more a night.

The idea isn't to give up the celebrations. It's to protect the basics so January doesn't find you exhausted. These seven habits are backed by science and fit into any December.

1. Protect your wake-up time, even if you go to bed late

The body's internal clock works best with steady schedules. After a late night, the temptation is to sleep until noon, but that shifts your whole clock and the next night you won't feel sleepy on time. Better: get up close to your usual time (one or two hours later at most) and make up for it with a short nap, as you'll see in point 6. Harvard Health lists a consistent schedule among the basic sleep hygiene practices.

2. Get morning light

Bright morning light tells your body the day has started and helps you feel sleepy earlier at night. A few minutes in the sun, having your coffee by the window or walking to the corner store is enough. In December, with more free time, it's easy to spend the morning indoors: that's exactly the day you need the light most.

3. Stop caffeine six hours before bed

In a study published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine (Drake and colleagues, 2013), a high dose of caffeine taken even six hours before bedtime cut participants' sleep by about an hour… and they didn't even notice. If you go to bed at eleven, your last coffee, dark soda or energy drink should be before five in the afternoon.

4. Watch out for the «nightcap»

Alcohol can help you fall asleep faster, but a review of studies on alcohol and sleep found it disrupts the second half of the night: more awakenings and less restorative sleep. That's why after a party you sometimes sleep many hours and still wake up tired. If you're going to drink, do it earlier in the evening, alternate with water and leave a few hours before bed.

5. Keep your phone away from the bed

The CDC recommends taking electronic devices out of the bedroom. The problem isn't only the screen's light: it's the «one more video», the family group chat that never stops and the novena photos everyone wants to comment on. Charge your phone away from the bed and use an alarm clock or turn on «do not disturb» at a fixed time.

6. If you nap, keep it short

A nap helps you recover from a late night, but length matters. The Sleep Foundation recommends that, for adults, it last about 20 minutes and no more than 30, early in the afternoon. Any longer and you enter deep sleep, wake up groggy and struggle to sleep that night.

7. Eat light when the night will be long

Natilla, buñuelos, tamales, lechona… December is delicious, but very heavy meals right before bed can make it harder to sleep; the CDC lists it among the things to avoid before bedtime. It's not about not eating: it's about the big meal not being the last thing you do before getting into bed.

Already stayed up late? A recovery plan

The next day: get up at a reasonable time, get morning light and drink water.

In the afternoon: a 20-minute nap before three, no longer.

At night: no coffee, a light dinner and go to bed a little earlier than usual.

Two or three late nights in a row: pick one night of the week with no plans to catch up.

And an important warning: if you're going to drive after a party or on very little sleep, don't. Fatigue also slows your reflexes.

In short

Enjoy the novenas, family and parties. Just protect three things: your wake-up time, afternoon coffee and your phone away from the bed. With that, December stops being a month of built-up exhaustion.

This article is for information only. If you often have trouble sleeping, snore loudly or feel very tired during the day, see a health professional.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) — Sleep.

Drake C. et al. (2013) — Caffeine Effects on Sleep Taken 0, 3, or 6 Hours before Going to Bed, Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine.

Ebrahim I. et al. (2013) — Alcohol and sleep I: effects on normal sleep, Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research.

Sleep Foundation — Napping.

Harvard Health Publishing — Sleep hygiene: Simple practices for better rest.

CDC / NIOSH — Light and the body clock.