

The Market for a Good Night's Rest

Sleep used to be the most basic part of daily life: you turned off the lights, closed your eyes, and hoped for the best. Now it looks more like a consumer category with its own gadgets, subscriptions, and status symbols. If modern life has taught people anything, it is that even rest can be optimized and sold.

Startups are betting that millions of exhausted customers will pay for relief. Some products are relatively simple: an app that plays soothing audio, a wearable that grades your night, a supplement that promises a calmer brain. Others are designed to feel like luxury technology. Eight Sleep, for example, has built a "sleep system" that works with your existing bed and tries to manage the body like a high-performance machine. Its latest version includes a water-based cover that adjusts temperature on each side, a base that changes elevation, speakers for guided meditations, and sensors that monitor breathing and heart rate. The pitch is clear: if your nights are chaotic, the bed will act like a quiet manager, nudging you back on track.

The cost matches the ambition. A basic setup costs thousands, and the full package can climb higher, plus a yearly subscription. That combination has become a familiar business model across the consumer internet. Companies want recurring revenue, and sleep provides an attractive argument: if you improve someone's rest, you are touching every hour of their life.

But not everyone wants to hand their bedroom over to algorithms. There is a growing countertrend that feels almost old-fashioned: paying a human being to tell you what you are doing wrong. Sleep coaching began as an industry focused on babies and toddlers. Parents hire consultants when a child wakes constantly or resists bedtime. The coach's job is partly technical (creating routines) and partly emotional (helping parents stay consistent).

Recently, some coaches have expanded to a new target: grown-ups who are overstimulated, anxious, and stuck in loops of bad habits. One consultant described moving into adult coaching after realizing that the parents she helped were barely functioning themselves. The work often goes beyond generic advice. Coaching can involve sessions over several months and detailed detective work. Sometimes the problem is surprisingly practical: eating most calories late at night, drinking so much water that bathroom trips become inevitable, or spending hours before bed scrolling and worrying.

This is where the modern sleep economy becomes almost philosophical. People do not just want more sleep; they want to feel in control. A coach can challenge the stories people tell themselves, like "If I sleep more, I'm less ambitious," or "I've always been an insomniac, so this is just who I am,". Instead of treating sleep as a moral failure, coaches frame it as a skill: something you can train, protect, and rebuild.

Even traditional fitness organizations are moving in this direction. The American Council on Exercise recently promoted a sleep and recovery coaching course, arguing that better rest

supports performance, metabolism, and long-term well-being. Sleep, in this view, is a cornerstone of recovery, as essential as the workout itself.

Of course, wherever there is coaching, automation follows. Sleep apps have started offering AI-powered "coaches" that analyze your data and generate recommendations. Garmin has added a sleep coaching feature to certain devices. The appeal is obvious: a robot does not charge by the hour. Still, a robotic coach may not give the kind of blunt guidance a human sometimes offers, like pointing out that a glowing TV across from your bed is not exactly a signal of calm. Technology can measure patterns, but it often struggles with context: stress at work, a breakup, a newborn, or the quiet panic that arrives at 2 a.m.

The reason this market exists is simple: people are tired. CDC data suggests a large share of American adults are not getting enough sleep. That gap between what people need and what they get has become a business opportunity. It has also created sleep tourism, with hotels repositioning rest as the main attraction. Some properties advertise rooms with high-end smart beds and retreats built around re-learning how to recover.

Yet for all the momentum, sleep tech faces a credibility problem. Many wearable devices rely on proxies (movement, heart rate, oxygen levels) to estimate sleep stages. Clinicians still consider polysomnography, which measures brain activity with electrodes, the gold standard. Without rigorous clinical studies, consumer devices may be better at observation than transformation. They can tell you that you slept badly, but they cannot necessarily fix it.

There is also the psychological trap of measurement itself. If your device declares you "unready" for the day, it can plant doubt before you even stand up. Sleep tracking can accidentally turn rest into another performance review.

The irony is that the most effective sleep interventions are often the simplest: consistent timing, a darker room, fewer screens, and a routine that signals 'the day is over'." That advice does not sound like innovation. But for an exhausted society, it may be the closest thing to a real upgrade.

- 1) How much sleep do you get each night? Do you have trouble sleeping?
- 2) What is your routine before bed? Do you use any sleeping tools/aides?
- 3) How does Korea view sleep?
- 4) How can tracking sleep potentially be harmful?
- 5) If you had \$1,000 to spend on improving your sleep, would you buy technology, hire a coach, or make changes to your environment?
- 6) If you had to design a sleep plan with zero spending, what would your top three rules be, and which would be hardest to follow?
- 7) Why do people today try to optimize everything

Gadget	(n)	a small device designed to do a specific task, often using technology	He bought a gadget that plays white noise when the room gets too quiet.
Relief	(n)	a feeling of comfort after stress, pain, or worry is reduced	She felt relief when she finally slept through the night.
Soothing	(adj)	calming and helping you feel less tense or anxious	A soothing playlist helped him relax after a long day.
Wearable	(n)	a device you wear on your body that tracks information like sleep or activity	His wearable showed that he woke up more often than he realized.
Grade	(v)	to evaluate and score the quality of something	The app will grade your sleep and suggest changes for the next night.
Base	(n)	the supportive bottom part of a bed that holds the mattress and can adjust position	The adjustable base lifted her head slightly to reduce snoring.
Elevation	(n)	the act of raising something to a higher position	The bed's elevation made it easier for him to breathe.
Nudge	(v)	to gently push or encourage someone to do something	The system nudged him to go to bed earlier by dimming the lights.
Countertrend	(n)	a movement that grows in the opposite direction from a main trend	As sleep tech expanded, a countertrend toward human coaching appeared.
Overstimulated	(adj)	receiving too much input or stimulation to relax easily	After hours of notifications, she felt overstimulated and couldn't fall asleep.

Barely	(adv)	only by a small amount; almost not	He was barely awake during the morning meeting.
Generic	(adj)	not specific or personalized; common and basic	Generic advice like “avoid screens” didn’t solve his problem.
Practical	(adj)	focused on real-life actions that work in everyday situations	A practical change was stopping water intake an hour before bed.
Inevitable	(adj)	certain to happen and hard to avoid	If he drinks coffee at 6 p.m., a late night feels inevitable.
Scroll	(v)	to move through content on a screen, usually by swiping or scrolling down	She promised herself not to scroll in bed after turning off the lights.
Metabolism	(n)	the body’s process of turning food into energy and managing energy use	Poor sleep can affect metabolism and make workouts feel harder.
Cornerstone	(n)	a vital part that supports and holds up the rest	For many athletes, recovery is the cornerstone of training.
Retreat	(n)	a planned stay focused on rest, health, or self- improvement	They booked a retreat designed to rebuild healthy sleep habits.
Proxy	(n)	an indirect measure used to estimate something that is harder to measure directly	A watch uses movement as a proxy for sleep depth.
Clinician	(n)	a medical professional who treats patients in a clinical setting	A clinician recommended a sleep study to check for apnea.

Electrode	(n)	a small sensor placed on the body to detect electrical signals	During the test, an electrode recorded activity while she slept.
Gold standard	(n)	the best and most trusted method used as a benchmark	Doctors consider lab sleep studies the gold standard for diagnosis.
Rigorous	(adj)	careful, strict, and thorough, especially in testing or research	The company could not point to rigorous studies proving its claims.
Declare	(v)	to announce or state something clearly and confidently	The device declared he was “unready,” which made him anxious.
Intervention	(n)	a step or action taken to improve a problem	A simple intervention was keeping the bedroom cooler at night.
Signal	(v)	to show or communicate that something is happening or should happen	A fixed bedtime routine can signal to the brain that it is time to sleep.
Innovation	(n)	a new idea, method, or product that changes how something is done	Some innovations in sleep focus more on tracking than on improvement.