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Sept.29, 2026

Doctors Say to Stay Away from This Viral Sleep ‘Hack’—Here’s Why

There’s nothing like a bad case of insomnia to make you seriously consider non-traditional sleep hacks. If previous sleep trends like [mouth tape](#), “[cognitive shuffling](#),” and [more](#) haven’t worked, you might be especially interested in the latest one: “[Salt stomping](#),” which refers to standing on salt before bed for a better night’s sleep.

But before you [toss some salt](#) on a sheet tray in the name of sleep, doctors want you to keep a few things to keep in mind—including that this could be bad for you.

Meet the experts: [W. Christopher Winter, MD](#), a neurologist and sleep medicine physician with Charlottesville Neurology and Sleep Medicine; [Gary Goldenberg, MD](#), assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital; and [Thea Gallagher, PsyD](#), clinical associate professor of psychology at NYU Langone Health.

What is salt stomping, and what does it claim to do?

The salt stomping trend was popularized by wellness creator Tammy Weatherhead and has spread from there. [According](#) to Weatherhead, you simply spread Epsom salt or sea salt in a shallow tray and stand on it for 10 minutes before bed.

There’s a lot of information swirling around out there about salt stomping, making it hard to sift through the noise. On a macro level, salt stomping leans into the idea of “[grounding](#)” into the earth, or making direct contact with earthly elements. While many people do this by walking barefoot in grass, dirt, or sand, salt technically qualifies, too. Grounding is a psychological practice that may help to ease anxiety, although [research](#) into this is ongoing. Social media fans swear that salt stomping can help to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in your body and get you relaxed enough to fall asleep.

Does salt stomping do anything?

Despite all the social media buzz, there is no scientific research that suggests salt stomping will do anything for you. “It does nothing,” says [W. Christopher Winter, MD](#), a neurologist and sleep medicine physician with Charlottesville Neurology and Sleep Medicine. “At this point in my career, it is tied with putting a bar of soap under your mattress as the most absurd sleep tip.”

There *may* be something in the *ritual* of salt stomping that helps calm you down for sleep, simply because it makes you focus on your senses for a few quiet minutes before bed, says [Thea Gallagher, PsyD](#), clinical associate professor of psychology at NYU Langone Health. “But there’s no evidence that the salt itself treats anxiety,” she says. Meaning, you could probably just stand there with no salt under your feet and get the same effect.

But Dr. Winter isn’t impressed by this trend. “I would keep in mind that you are a grown adult stomping around on salt to help improve your sleep,” he says, urging people to “take a hard look at this situation.”

There's a big side effect of salt stomping to be aware of.

While sprinkling some Epsom salt in your bath may help soothe tired muscles, standing directly on salt with your bare feet will likely only irritate your skin—and in a few ways, says [Gary Goldenberg, MD](#), assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital.

Salt can draw moisture from your skin, making it dry and cracked, he says. “Salt crystals can be sharp, cutting and irritating the skin,” Dr. Goldenberg continues. This can lead to infection. Dr. Goldenberg adds that if you have dry skin at baseline or a condition like psoriasis or eczema, you could make things even worse by trying this trend.

What to do instead

It makes sense that the idea of a quick and natural solution for sleep issues would be appealing. But Dr. Winter says that salt stomping should be a wake-up call that it's time to talk to a healthcare provider about your sleep. “Find real solutions to your sleep problems or real enhancements,” he says. “This is snake oil defined.”

While you're waiting to be seen, Gallagher suggests a few mental health hacks to help you destress. “For a more reliable wind-down, try progressively tensing and releasing your muscles, or write down tomorrow's tasks so you're not trying to hold them all in your head,” she says.

But, of course, if your anxiety is making sleep tough, Gallagher stresses that “it's worth addressing the underlying problem.” Talk to a healthcare provider about ways to healthily manage your anxiety, so you can get some good sleep—without the need for hacks.