



Sleep

“The best bridge between despair and hope is a good night’s sleep.”

— E. Joseph Cossman

We live in a culture where a strange sense of bravado exists regarding how little sleep we get. “I only need five hours, and I’m good to go,” “I only got four hours of sleep last night, I’m just so busy.” Everyone needs 7-9 hours of sleep per night, and getting adequate sleep is one of the best things you can do for your emotional and physical health. Personally, I think 7 hours of sleep per night is on the skimpy side, and I believe that when we’re stressed, dealing with anxiety and depression, or find ourselves with daytime fatigue and lack of motivation, we would do well to get 8-9 hours. However, getting 8 hours of sleep doesn’t mean going to bed at 10 PM and getting up at 6 AM because none of us sleeps the entire time we’re in bed. So, instead of thinking of getting 8 hours of sleep, think of getting 8 hours of sleep *opportunity*. To get 8 actual hours of sleep, you probably need closer to 8 and a half hours of sleep opportunity.

Insomnia

We all suffer from an occasional bout of insomnia from time to time, but sometimes insomnia can become chronic, and when it does, all bets are off when it comes to feeling and functioning well. I’ve always said that, without exception, anyone who goes three or more nights without much sleep is not going to be able to function well—cognitive and emotional performance simply takes a hit after a few bad nights of sleep. If you’re suffering insomnia, either having a hard time falling asleep (called increased sleep latency) or waking up in the middle of the night and not being able to go back to sleep quickly, try ensuring good “sleep hygiene.” Here are

some of the guidelines:

1. Prepare for bed an hour or so before you plan to actually get in bed—put on your pajamas, perform nighttime grooming, turn overhead lights off and dim lamps, cease looking at screens (your phone, the TV, etc.) If you must be on your computer or phone, consider wearing blue-blocking sunglasses.
2. Make sure your room is dark. Some people are sensitive to small amounts of light (e.g., those little lights that remain on even when the TV is turned off, light coming from under a door, etc.) Consider wearing a sleeping mask if needed, but remember to keep it laundered and clean as it can encourage bacterial growth.
3. Make sure your room is cool enough—around 66 degrees F is ideal for most.
4. Make sure the room is quiet.
5. If you sleep with a partner, have a pact that you’ll try to protect the sleep environment by respecting noise and light rules. If you sleep with a dog or cat and they keep you up at night, consider moving them to another room.
6. Don’t watch TV in bed—reserve the bed for sleep and sex and nothing more. We’re equipped with brains that are very easily conditioned so make sure that your bed does not become your body’s cue to watch TV, play on your phone, or engage in worry. And, if you’ve been in bed between 20-30 minutes without going to sleep, get up, move to another room, engage in a quiet activity like reading or meditating (not TV watching!) until you feel drowsy again. This often seems extreme, but it’s vitally important that you don’t condition yourself so that the bed is a signal for your mind to get active.
7. Consider rocking. We use rocking to soothe and help children nod off, and the same tactic can be helpful for adults. If you have a rocking chair, consider rhythmically rocking yourself into drowsiness. No rocking chair? Consider rolling out a yoga mat or simply lying on the floor and gently rocking from side to side or doing some gently spinal twists by bending your knees and letting them “wind-shield wiper” back and forth.
8. Avoid caffeine after noon (quit drinking it earlier if possible). Caffeine has a very long half-life and remains in our system long after the last cup of coffee or can of diet coke.
9. Avoid the night cap. Although it can feel like a glass of wine might be a good idea to help you relax, alcohol actually impairs sleep, particularly the deep restorative stages of sleep. Try going without and see if it makes a difference.
10. Honor your circadian rhythm—try to get exposure to sunlight during the daytime, even if it is just for a short while. And, again, try darkening the inside of your home as the sun goes down.
11. Stick to a fairly strict schedule—go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends!

Resources

**Note: For hyperlinks, right click and select
“open hyperlink”**

Books

Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams, by Matthew Walker, PhD (published in 2017) is an excellent, easy-to-read exploration of sleep—why we need it, what happens when we don't get enough and how to ensure that we sleep well.

Podcasts/Audio-Visual Resources

[How To Improve Your Sleep And Why You Should | Professor Matthew Walker | Audio Only - YouTube](#)



[Yoga Nidra with Richard Miller, PhD--20 minute relaxation guide](#)

Websites

Information from the CDC on common sleep disorders:

https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep_key_disorders.html

