



Getting a Good Night's Sleep!

Scientists have gone to great lengths to fully understand sleep's benefits. In studies of humans and other animals they have discovered that sleep plays a critical role in immune function, metabolism, memory, learning, and other vital functions. There are many factors that impact on sleep including stress, snoring, sleep apnea, blood sugar imbalances, nightmares, vivid dreams, stress, and diseases like hyperthyroidism. This article offers some naturopathic support if you are struggling with getting a good night's sleep.

Poor sleep is a modern phenomenon with over 50% adults in the UK failing to get enough. Adults need on average of 7 hours sleep a night to remain healthy – more after long haul flights, long distance travel, illness, infection, surgery, stress and exposure to the cold. Insomnia is classified as receiving less than 4 hours sleep for more than 3 nights per week. The impact of sleep disorders affects many people on a day to day basis. Common symptoms include impaired reflexes, excessive clumsiness, increased irritability, mood swings, reduced work capacity and poor concentration. We know that the implications of chronically poor sleep to our health are far reaching including elevating the risk of developing new disease such as diabetes, heart disease, depression, obesity and even reducing life span.

What are the different forms of sleep?

First we begin with the in-between phase which equates to 15% as is the hypnotherapy stage. We then travel further into a combination of REM – 35% dream, sub-conscious relaxes. And non-REM – 50% dream, conscious relax. If we do not reach an REM phase we don't get deep relaxation and this leads to a lack of the feel good hormone "serotonin" which makes melatonin.

Common misconceptions about sleep: Sleep does not store. You can't catch up on it at the weekends. One hour's sleep before midnight is not worth 2 after. Going to bed early is not a cure for tiredness/insomnia

Naturopathic Support:

A recent study has linked the importance of dietary nutrients associated with short and long term sleep duration. This study has highlighted the crucial link of diet and sleep to long-term health. It may be sensible for you to consider seeing a naturopathic nutritional therapist such as myself if you cannot return to a regular sleep pattern. However try eating a lighter meal in the evening, avoiding starchy (beans, potatoes, pasta) and sugary foods in addition to alcohol and carbonated drinks because they can lead to flatulence, digestive disturbance and contribute towards blood sugar imbalances (called hypoglycaemia) – this includes waking between 2:00 am-4:00 am and nightmares. Don't go to bed hungry – a light snack one hour before is good – e.g rice cakes with mashed sardines. If you eat at 6pm you will need a snack at 9-10pm.

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07747 133170 / 0208 487 3631

contact@justineevans.co.uk creationfertility.com justineevans.co.uk

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Smoking and caffeine are known to increase blood pressure which reduces REM sleep so it is best to avoid if possible.

Change your Pillow – *Most people do not realize that their pillows are one of the reasons why they wake up with sore backs in the morning, back stiffness and pain in the morning. The McTimoney Chiropractor at The Conscious Health Centre recommends using a neck pillow.* Neck pillows help relieve the pressure from the neck. Most snoring is caused by the air passages of the throat becoming blocked. If you use a neck pillow, those blocked air passages open and make breathing easier. Having a neck pillow can help posture and reduce the risk of developing conditions that affect the spine. The neck pillow aligns the cervical spine so that you naturally relax the spinal cord and stretch the neck into its proper position. Apparently the pillow should sit comfortably between the shoulder and neck. You may also sleep with a pillow between the legs when sleeping on your side to help re-align your pelvis and to keep your pelvic floor stable.

Ensure you have a quiet time for relaxation and meditation. Avoid the TV, lap top or paperwork for at least 30 minutes before going to bed. Use the bedroom for sleeping not for TV or work. Ensure that the room is a comfortable temperature – no higher than 65 degrees .

Establish a normal sleeping time

Take a pre-bedtime bath to relax your muscles. Thus helps to shift the nervous system into the parasympathetic state and shifts your brain into sleep mode. Take a bath before about an hour before bedtime, adding lavender essential oil or 500 grams Epsom Salts to help relax.

If you wake in the night due to worrying about work then before going to sleep write a list of all the things that are playing on your mind and schedule them into your working hours.

Drink a cup of herbal tea, **Chamomile flowers** provide soothing relief for the nervous system, **Oatstraw** is balancing, **Valerian and hop flowers** help to relax and induce a deep, restful sleep, whilst **Passionflower is believed to** bring a sense of calm

Learn Meditation and Sleep Awareness Breathing: Does your mind race with thoughts and worries in bed? Are you playing the day's activities in your mind? These may increase anxiety and fuel insomnia. Before bed or if you wake during the night simmer the mind down, focusing on each breath and visualise it travelling through your body. This mindful form of meditation or "awareness breathing" is believed to help you get to sleep faster. So, how does it work? By following the air as it moves in and out of your lungs, your mind, you become occupied with your breath—not your anxieties.

Calming the Mind

Lying in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Allow your breath to settle into a slow and natural rhythm. Bring your awareness to your brow centre and picture your mind as a lake. At first, you may see many waves on the surface of your mind-lake. These are your thoughts and current concerns. Now

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Imagine that someone has dropped a large, beautiful diamond into the water. Gently try to see this gemstone shining brightly on the lakebed. If you try too hard you will stir up the waters which will become muddy and you will be unable to see the diamond. So when thoughts interrupt, do not drive them away – this only encourages them to return. Try instead to gently focus all your attention on trying to see the diamond. Slow down the flow of your breath and allow it to become smooth. Your mind, which is closely connected to your breath, will respond by becoming calmer and any ripples will gradually subside so that you can eventually see the diamond clearly. Holding on to the image of the diamond, notice how stilling your mind and focusing on the gem brings a silent, profound inner calm. Let the image of the diamond fade and allow the silence to envelop you by focusing all your senses on it. Imagine that you can see, smell and touch this silence.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This practice uses the mind and body simultaneously to induce sleep. Begin with the muscles in your feet and slowly moving up to your calves, thighs, pelvis, abdomen, chest, neck, head and face muscles, relax the muscles in each area, one group at a time, clenching and releasing the muscle groups. You can practice this technique in any sleep position; the key is to pick one you are most comfortable in, then relax your muscle groups from there.

Or listen to some of my visualisations here <http://www.justineevans.co.uk/workshops/on-line-courses/>

During the Night: If you wake in the night and cannot return to sleep, get out of bed and spray your feet with COLD water for 30 seconds. Don't dry them just between the toes and get back into bed. If you want to take it one step further, then put wet socks on! Honestly, this does work as it helps the body return to the parasympathetic state!

Disclaimer: This article is meant for general information only and should not be construed as guidance or recommendation. It does not take into account any medication you may be taking, food sensitivities or allergies, nor any form of health issue. Naturopathic consultations and assessment are recommended on an individual basis and it is important to speak with a health professional or your GP before changing your diet or implementing changes to lifestyle.