

SOUND SLUMBER *June 1, 2008*

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Ahhh the power of sleep. Sound sleep that is. Our need for sleep has not changed over the years, yet our ability and willingness to sleep has declined. Many of us are operating on fumes, barely able to keep our eyes open throughout the day, our energy zapped from less than recuperative sleep or just a lack of time spent in slumber. Sleep is our charger—like a cell phone has a battery charger, we require a certain amount of time spent sleeping for the purpose of resetting, fine-tuning, and restoring for optimal operation.

Every system in our bodies uses sleep: during rest memories are being organized; new things learned are being processed; the immune system is producing new killer cells for future battle against infections; growth hormone is being used to repair tissue (think about your last brutal leg workout!), build new tissue, and combat the effects of stress. Without adequate sleep, you do not think as clearly, memory is compromised, decisions are more difficult to make, reasoning declines, and your body's chemical reactions respond in a way that increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, even and overweight/obesity.

Modifying your sleep regimen does not need to be complicated, but like anything, it requires consistency. Follow these strategies for optimal recovery and a good night's rest!

1. **Get up at the same time every day.** Too many individuals think that since it's the weekend, they need to sleep in....catch up on sleep. Unfortunately, you can't play catch-up with sleep. By sleeping a few extra hours on the weekends, your body's clock gets out of sync. I get up on the weekdays at 4:30am. My body is so used this routine, that by 8:30pm I'm ready to go to bed, and on Sat. morning, whether I stayed up a little later or not, I'm up at least by 5am. No alarm clock necessary!
2. **Take an hour.** Or 30 minutes. But take some time before hitting the sack to wind down and make the transition from harried business person to cozy burrito wrapped up in bed! Your mind and body need some time to prepare for relaxation.
3. **Make YOURSELF and your sleep a priority.** We expect so much of ourselves as employees, parents, significant others, family members, friends, etc. We cannot be our best in these roles if we do not get adequate sleep. If you are in bed with someone who snores, help him/her get help. If the dog keeps you awake, put him in another room.
4. **Ditch thinking that you need to do and be everything for everyone.** Make a to-do list and scratch each item off one-by one. If you must keep a pencil and paper by the bed, use it before shutting off the light. Get those stressful thoughts and worries out of your head.
5. **Go home at quitting time.** Not 2 or 3 hours later than everyone else. You may think that you'll get more done by burning the midnight oil, but you'll actually be far more productive, accurate and faster after a good night's sleep.
6. **Make it dark.** Cover up your clock and any other electronic lights in your sleeping area. Even dim lights can tell your brain that it's time to wake up.
7. **Ditch the electronics.** Turn off your cell. Shut off the computer. Leave no chance for electronics to get in the way of sleep.

8. **Ban the booze.** While alcohol may relax you, taken in before or close to bed time, it can keep you in a lighter, less recuperative stage of sleep.
9. **Be comfortable.** If your mattress is uncomfortable, get a new one! It doesn't have to be fancy—it just has to allow you to sink into a restorative sleep and wake up without soreness, aches, or pains.
10. **Be cool.** Turn down the thermostat. Take a bath. Cooler temps signal your body to sleep. Your core temp decreases after a hot bath.
11. **Take a nap.** One nap up to 90 minutes in length between 1 and 4 pm can reduce your sleep debt, boost performance, and won't affect nighttime sleep. Take a 20 minute snoozer if you're at work!
12. **Exercise.** You were wondering where on the list this would be, weren't you? Activity can reduce the time it takes to fall asleep an average of 12 minutes and increases total sleep time by 42 minutes. The brain releases serotonin with exercise, which encourages sleep. Low levels are associated with anger, depression, and anxiety. Avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime; however, to allow energy levels to decline.
13. **Ditch the news.** Focusing on the chaos going on in the world just prior to going to bed can spark your body's arousal mechanism, making it difficult to fall asleep. Avoid scary or exciting books too.
14. **Practice relaxation.** Consider yoga, medication, tai chi, biofeedback, guided imagery, or prayer to learn to quiet your mind and nervous system.
15. **Play.** Get together with friends. For women being with others can raise oxytocin, which decreases the stress hormone, cortisol.