

SOME INGREDIENTS FOR RESTFUL SLEEP

Sleep affects every tissue and organ of the body and plays a massive role in cellular repair. According to the NIH, adequate sleep is critical for cell to cell communication, regulating metabolism, our brain's ability to lay down memory and optimize concentration. There are several resources at the bottom of the handout that detail and documents these impacts.

Until my 3rd year in grad school, I had no experience of sleeplessness; sleep deprivation sure, but no trouble falling asleep. I was a *head hit the pillow-out in instant* kind of person. And then while preparing for Board exams in the spring of 2007, reeling from three years of sustained abuse of my own body-mind during school, my sleep went off the rails. Now, when things are out of balance or stress is particularly high, sleep disturbance is an Achilles heel for me, it's one of the places that imbalance shows up. And SO, I've had the opportunity to look at this from the inside.

Now, if I experience more than 2 consecutive nights of disturbed sleep, I find it best to take myself a bit earnestly by the hand and apply the things I've found help:

- Discipline regarding sleep hygiene.
- Observe the mind's tendency, with aloofness, to become anxious about not being able to sleep which tends to exacerbate and not solve anything.
- Incorporate practices like the River Rock Meditation or the Bowl exercise below.

When I do this for 3-7 days consistently, things get back on track. In the rare circumstance when this doesn't work, it's generally a time of acute emotional processing (grief, change) and I simply trust that my body-mind is working through it in the way it needs. I hope these ideas will support you to find your own prescription for optimizing sleep.

Basic sleep hygiene – simple steps that optimize sleep

- **Moderate fluids** after 6pm to prevent or decrease night time urination.
- **Eat early enough** so you're not landing in bed full from dinner. It's important not to go to bed already hungry. If you exercise at night or have high metabolism, consider a small snack before bed to prevent low blood sugar in the early morning and a flood of stress hormones and agitation as the body tries to wake up looking for food.
- **Moderate caffeine and other stimulants after noon** (the timing and limits on this are very individual, test things out in the laboratory of your own body)
- **Have bed/bedroom be only for sleep.**
- **Institute regular time of going to bed and waking up.**
- **Slow down the last hour before bed** (unplug from social media, conclude work projects, social media, bill paying). Even the light from kindles have been found to adversely influence sleep. You are an adult. You may choose to do any of the above. Simply know that if you're also desiring deep and restorative sleep, a different choice will support that ultimate goal and your overall health.
- **Create an evening ritual** (could include reading, a bath, some gentle yoga or Tai Chi or meditation, aromatherapy, incense, all indicators to the body it's time for sleep).

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- **Body Scan to Prepare for sleep** (20 min MP3 available on the Resources page).
- **Try to limit intense/charged conversations before bed.** And, sometimes they happen. So then, have realistic expectations sleep will be impacted. We can all survive a single night of poor sleep. Our bodies are designed to manage. Prolonged and chronic sleeplessness have more adverse consequences.

Sleep Visualization Exercise for the agitated hamster cage mind.

This can be useful either when attempting to fall asleep or waking in the middle of the night with the mind circling like a hamster cage. Different minds and personalities will find it useful in different ways. Explore the practice with liberal adaptations however seems to work for you.

1. Place a small ornamental bowl beside your bed with small notepad or pieces of paper and pen. If your mind is doing acrobatics, write the primary thought or concern in a few key words. Fold up the paper. Place in the bowl saying to yourself, "I need to sleep now. I can attend to it in the morning."
OR
2. Beside the bowl, place the image of someone you deeply trust. This could be a person, alive or no longer living. It could be a spiritual presence that brings you solace. It may be a teddy bear. Same practice. Encapsulate the concern in a few words on a piece of paper. Fold and place in the bowl while invoking this trusting presence and saying, "_____, I need to rest. Please *hold* this for me."
OR
3. Don't worry about the bowl or the physical image. As the mind is turning, simply invoke the trusting presence to hold whatever is in your heart-mind and say, "_____, I need to rest. Please *hold* this for me."

Resources of Interest

Freconomics Series on Sleep

<http://freakonomics.com/podcast/the-economics-of-sleep-part-1-a-new-freakonomics-radio-episode/>

Harvard Medical School

Analysis of Impacts of Sleep, fascinating interactive component outlining historical evolution of some views on sleep in the Western World, highlights studies including those examining sleep deficit impact on hormone regulation and carbohydrate metabolism.

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters>

Huffington Post on the Consequences of Sleep Deprivation

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/derek-kren/the-consequences-of-sleep-deprivation-that-will-keep-you-up-at-night_b_9742376.html

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