

Are you Getting the Right Amount of Sleep?

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If only we could capture what we all need to do to have a good night's sleep, not just one, but a continuous wave of blissful sleeping.

We all know too well, how rested and energised we feel after 8 hours of sleep. Feeling that we can conquer our day from the moment we wake up, more at ease and able to manage whatever is thrown our way. Though, all too often fatigue, weight gain and illness can be reduced if we fall into a regular pattern of sleep.

Managing thyroid levels require extra monitoring as Hyperthyroidism (overactive) may inhibit sleep due to excess stimulation of the nervous system, along with muscle twitches. Hypothyroidism (underactive) may have symptoms of cold intolerance and joint pain which may interfere with sleep. Always check your medication, take regular tests checking for a complete Thyroid Panel. If results are within a healthy range and you have spoken to your doctor, then a Nutritional Therapist may be able to help balance your symptoms.

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Stages of Sleep Non-Rapid Eye Movement (Non-REM)

- **Stage 1** - initial dozing, light sleep, lasts 1-5 minutes
- **Stage 2** - more subdued, drop in temperature, relaxed muscles, slowed breathing and heart rate. New pattern of brain waves and eye movements, lasts 10-25 minutes.
- **Stage 3** - deep Sleep, delta waves, difficult to rouse. Experts state that this stage is critical to restorative sleep, allowing the body to recover, grow and support the immune system. Brain activity is reduced, though evidence has been shown of insightful thinking, creativity and memory. Lasts 20-40 minutes.

We spend most time in deep sleep during the first half of the night. These deep stage 3 cycles get shorter as sleep continues and more time gets spent in Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. Essential for cognitive functions, memory, learning and creativity. REM stage happens after you have been asleep for 90 minutes, it is where we dream. REM increases as sleep continues and can make up around 25% of adult's sleep.

Factors that may interrupt sleep are bedtime routine, nutrition, and blue light technology.

Is it bedtime yet?

Circadian Rhythm is the name given to describe the body's internal clock that balances the sleep/wake cycle and can be interrupted by light and timing of sleep. The best time to go to sleep is before 11.30pm. Melatonin, the sleep hormone, will have started to secrete by 9pm and stops production around 7.30am. Therefore, the most effective window of sleep is between 11.30pm - 7.30am, for a standard 8 hour's sleep, or earlier if you need more rest. Melatonin not only regulates our circadian rhythm, but also protects our cells from oxidative stress otherwise known as inflammation and in addition may protect from developing tumours. Melatonin is not only essential for sleep, but it is also essential for our health. Without darkness, and bedtime routine we will not produce enough of this restorative and beneficial hormone.

Do I need to switch off my phone, yes you do!

Blue light technology found in computer screens, mobile phones, tablets, LED and fluorescent lights can suppress the production of melatonin and interfere with sleep. Therefore, going to bed and switching electrical devices off and using an alarm clock instead of a phone, would be one recommendation for a better night's sleep.

Eat to Sleep

Melatonin can also be increased through eating the following food combinations containing tryptophan, vitamin B6 and copper. These foods can mix and match. For example, tuna, pumpkin seeds and eggs:

- Chicken and pumpkin seeds
- Oats, banana and sesame seeds
- Beef, shitake mushrooms and sweet potato
- Avocado, chickpeas and pistachios
- Tuna, pistachios and oysters
- Eggs and Salmon

Prepare in the day for a good night's sleep

Lifestyle tips are just as important as nutrition, when we are resting, we are absorbing our nutrients, lowering stress levels and being prepared for a restful night's sleep. Here are some useful tips:

- Exercise for 30 minutes per day, at least 2 hours before bedtime
- Fresh air at least 10 minutes per day to increase oxygen levels and absorb vitamin D
- Eat meals consciously and mindfully
- Dab aromatherapy oils on wrist, mix with grapeseed oil for absorption – relaxation oils include lemon, lavender, rose, ylang ylang, lemon grass and orange
- Lavender pouch for under the pillow
- Air diffuser in bedroom to clean air use with one of these relaxing oils, lavender, chamomile, sweet marjoram and bergamot oil
- Sleep with window open to allow ventilation
- Epsom Salt Bath before bedtime, bathe for 20 minutes in 1 mugful of salts to aid muscle relaxation
- Deep Breathing to lower stress and calm mind, breathe in for 5, hold for 5 and out for 10 – repeat until your breathing slows, mind stops racing and your shoulders relax

Checking the data

There are a number of nutritional tests you can take to see how your body is coping with stress, and these are known as stress tests. It is non-invasive and can be completed at home, as only saliva is required. In addition, there are nutritional markers that test for melatonin levels, stress levels and nutrient status to personalise your diet with high nutrient foods to support relaxation and sleep.

The first step right now is plan for a good night's sleep, make a note in your diary, prepare in the day and follow through; you deserve it.

Example menu plan to support sleep and relaxation

Breakfast: Smoothie Drink

Ingredients:

- 2 handfuls of spinach
- $\frac{3}{4}$ glass of almond milk
- 2 ice cubes
- $\frac{1}{2}$ avocado
- 1 tbsp pumpkin seeds
- 1 organic egg
- 2 drops of vanilla extract or 2 tsps. organic maple syrup to taste

Method: Blend and serve

Lunch: Baked salmon served with crushed walnuts and a "rainbow" salad served with 2 tbsps. mixed seeds and 1 small, sweet potato

Dinner: Stir fried beef, served with shitake mushrooms, roasted kale and cauliflower

Supper: (at least 1 hour before bedtime): 2 tbsps. oats, $\frac{1}{2}$ banana sliced, mixed in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water 1 hour before bed with a cup of chamomile tea

Snack Idea: Roasted chickpeas (roast chickpeas from can straight onto a roasting tray with heated olive oil, season and cook for 30 minutes. Simple!

