8 Steps to Better Sleep
Today we will focus on

- Why sleep is important
- What happens while you sleep?
- Key factors for sleep
- Our 8 top tips for a good night’s sleep
What’s your sleep struggle?

Who has trouble getting to sleep?

Who has trouble staying asleep?

Who often looks at their mobile phone in bed?

Who regularly feels fatigued during the day?
You are not alone – sleep stats

- Worldwide **62% of adults** feel they don’t sleep well when they go to bed
- **Women are 40%** more likely to have insomnia
- Large study cites **Finns as the world’s best sleepers** and Japanese as the worst!
- **46% of people** look at their phone as the last thing they do before falling asleep
What is normal?
So how much do we need?

- Almost one third of our lives is spent sleeping (or trying to!)
- The amount of sleep you need is individual & varies at certain life stages
- Lack of sleep creates a ‘sleep debt’ or a ‘sleep deficit’
Why is sleep so important?

Not just feeling better after a good night’s sleep! Sleep plays a crucial role in:

- Metabolism, appetite and insulin control
- Cardiovascular function
- Memory and learning
- Mood and attention
- Healing and repair
- Immune function
Sleep and brain health

• Sleep deprivation affects cognitive function
• Essential for consolidating memories
• Sleep disruption is linked with neurodegenerative disease
• Cleaning the brain!
Sleep and immune function

• Lack of sleep affects our ability to fight off infection
  o <5 hours sleep = 4.5 x more likely to develop a cold
  o 7 hours = least likely

• Sleep helps our immune T Cells function better (fight viruses)
Sleep Cycle Stages

1. lightest sleep
2. light sleep
3. deep sleep
4. REM
Non - rem sleep
Key factors for sleep
CIRCADIAN RHYTHM

INHIBITION

STIMULATION

MELATONIN
Pineal gland

SCN
Suprachiasmatic nucleus

Superior cervical ganglion
Body Clock

- Greatest cardiovascular and skeletal muscle strength
- Fastest reaction time
- Peak coordination
- Peak in alertness
- Elevated testosterone
- Bowel movement likely
- Insulin secretion with first meal timing
- Lowest body temperature
- Deepest sleep
- Melatonin secretion begins
- Bowel movements suppressed
- Peak in body temperature and blood pressure
8 Top tips for a good night’s sleep

1. Practise good sleep hygiene
2. Target stress
3. Balance your plate
4. Include tryptophan rich foods
5. Ditch the stimulants
6. Cut back on alcohol
7. Exercise
8. Support digestion
1. Check sleep hygiene

- Natural light in the morning or try a light box
- Sleep in a darkened room
- Evaluate the comfort of mattress & pillows
- Go to bed and wake up around the same time or not!
- Bedroom temperature
- Ditch the electronics!
Screen time disrupts circadian rhythm

- 2-4 hours before bed start blue-blocking
  - Try blue light blocking glasses
  - Set night-time mode on screens

- Dim lighting in the house

- Switch to low-blue amber coloured lights or use anti-blue light filters
2. Embrace stress management

- Breathing exercises eg. Body scan technique, abdominal breathing or 4,7,8 breathing
- Mindfulness & Meditation
- Reading books not watching screens
- Hot baths – lower core body temperature
- Ear plugs – quieten your environment
- Boundaries and breaks
- Try aromatherapy using essential oils
- Watch less news
4:6 Breathing

1. Sit comfortably in your chair
2. Close your eyes, if comfortable
3. Feel your feet grounded into the floor (relaxed), arms resting by your side
4. Gently breathe in through your nose, feeling your belly and diaphragm rise, to a count of 4
5. Gently breathe out through your nose, feeling your belly and diaphragm deflate, to a count of 6
Magnesium: nature’s tranquiliser

- Almonds, cashews, pecans
- Wholegrains - oats, buckwheat, quinoa
- Leafy green vegetables
- Legumes - lentils, beans, chickpeas
- Dark chocolate (+70%)

- Magnesium bath / foot soak
3. Eat a well-balanced plate
Bedtime snacks

• Oatcakes with any 100% nut butter or other protein e.g., cottage cheese
• Kiwi fruit - 1 or 2
• Small handful of walnuts or almonds
• Small bowl of porridge topped with flaxseed or nuts
• Montmorency sour cherry juice – drizzled on yoghurt or porridge
4. Regular tryptophan-rich foods

- Meat – chicken breast, turkey, beef, lamb
- Fish – shellfish, halibut, mackerel, cod
- Shellfish – lobster, prawns, crayfish, oysters
- Legumes – butter / kidney beans, black beans, lentils
- Grains - whole oats, buckwheat
- Cheese – parmesan, mozzarella, cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Bananas
- Nuts & seeds – chia, sesame, flax, sunflower, pistachios, cashews, almonds, hazelnuts
5. Reduce caffeine

- Raises stress hormones - cortisol & adrenaline
- Disrupts our natural sleep-wake cycle - blocks the action of adenosine
- Can take up to 10 hours to completely clear caffeine from the bloodstream
And don’t forget other stimulants

Avoid:

- Chocolate
- Cigarettes
- Soft drinks
- Energy drinks
- Non-herbal teas
- Diet pills
- Check medications for caffeine
6. The myth of alcohol-induced sleep

Have you noticed you don’t sleep well after you’ve had a few drinks?

• Prevents deep sleep
• Creates blood sugar imbalances
• Suppresses serotonin
7. Fresh air & exercise

- A natural boost to serotonin levels
- Outside exercise boosts endorphins & serotonin further
- Exercise improves sleep quality – but best not too close to bedtime
8. Support Digestion

Gut Microbiota

• Approx. 90% of the body’s serotonin is produced in the digestive tract…

• So, it’s vital to keep our gut happy!
Avoid heavy meals before bed

- Big & highly-refined / fatty meals fire up metabolism
- Body works hard to digest the food
- Lying down - interferes with digestion causing acid reflux - heartburn & indigestion
Other tactics - power nap?
Heavy or weighted blanket
Breathing techniques:

**Sleep support** -
- Abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing
- Body scan technique

**Calming / support anxiety** -
- Box breathing
- 4-7-8 breathing

Caffeine free teas with herbs to support sleep:
- Yogi-Tea – Bedtime
- Pukka – Night-time
- Clipper – Snore & Peace

Think it might be more serious?

**Sleep Apnoea**
STOPBang Questionnaire:
https://britishsnoring.co.uk/stop_bang_questionnaire.php

**Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS)**
- Get deficiencies checked
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine & nicotine
- Ensure your exercising

Book recommendations:
- Nick Littlehales: *Sleep* (Elite sports sleep coach and fan of naps!)
- Dr Lindsay Browning: *Navigating Sleeplessness: How to Sleep Deeper and Better for Longer* (Sleep expert & Psychologist)
References


- Nature Communications (2020) *Circadian control of brain glymphatic and lymphatic fluid flow*, Hablitz and al  [https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-18115-2](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-18115-2)


- Sleep Foundation (2022) *Napping*  [https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene/napping](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene/napping)
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