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10 TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

Do you feel tired? Do you wish you had better sleep?

How Much Sleep?

Research tells us that adults need 8 hours and 15 minutes of sleep on average every night for optimal brain and body functioning. Let's round that out to 8 to 9 hours on average.

Just note that children and teenagers run on a different sleep cycle.

Stages of Sleep

The first stage of sleep is a transition phase between waking and sleeping. During this stage your brain waves are initially active and fast (Beta waves) and slowly move into a more relaxed and calm state (Alpha waves).

The second stage of sleep is light sleep. During this stage your brain waves slow to Theta state where you are still awake but your body is drifting into sleep. This is the stage of sleep that many people with insomnia stay in. Theta state is also associated with deep states of meditation.

Stages three and four are considered deep and restorative sleep. When in deep sleep your brain frequency is usually in Delta wave. Deep sleep gives your immune system a boost.

Stress and Sleep

When you are stressed your body releases chemicals which interferes with the deep sleep process. This is when we feel "sleep deprived". And when we consistently miss out on deep and restorative sleep, our body feels sore and aching. This is a sign that our immune system has been suppressed.

Stress and Weight

Research tells us that there is a link between sleep deprivation and weight gain. When you are sleep deprived your body produces chemicals that promote hunger and craving for starchy, high-carb, sweet, and high-calorie foods.

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(1) Sleep Routine

Establish a predictable sleep and wake cycle. Try to get to bed around the same time every night, and set your alarm for the same time every morning.

(2) Screens

The blue light from your device replicates some of the UV light from the sun, so your brain is given the message that it is daylight and should stay alert. A blue light filter can be helpful, but seriously consider putting down devices at least two hours before your bed time.

(3) Hot Shower

Have a hot shower just before bed so that your body cools rapidly. The research tells us that your body temperature should be in the process of dropping as you go to sleep, and so it might be helpful to use air conditioning to induce a temperature reduction.

(4) Dark Room

When it is dark the retina sends information to the brain to produce melatonin to start the sleep cycle. Melatonin is a key sleep chemical. Adjust the lighting in all parts of the house before bedtime to kickstart the "circadian rhythm". Turn off bright lights, dim lights, or use lamps.

(5) Reduce Caffeine

Ideally you should aim for 0 to 2 serves of caffeine per day and set a "cutoff" time in the afternoon. Caffeine contributes to sleep problems because it blocks a sleep promoting chemical called 'adenosine' which is vital for the deep sleep stages.

(6) Alcohol

Alcohol leads to disrupted sleep as you will wake several times in the night as the alcohol wears off. Ideally you should stop drinking several hours before bed, or have no alcohol at all.

(7) Exercise

30 minutes of exercise during the day (but not right before bedtime) helps promote sleep.

(8) Food

Lots of protein before bed can increase your energy levels, and avoid simple carbohydrates (e.g., white bread, pasta, and baked treats). Consume small amounts of complex carbohydrates as these foods are rich in amino acids that convert to serotonin that promote sedation. These include popcorn, oatmeal, and other wholegrain foods. Other foods that promote sleep include almonds, walnuts, cottage cheese, raspberries, and chamomile tea.

(9) No Daytime Napping.

I think that this is fairly self explanatory!

(10) Meditation

Meditation is a powerful tool to calm your brain and body. And with so many free apps available, it is now very easy to listen to a 5 minute meditation before bedtime.