



A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP

By Jessica Donovan

We are all aware of how inadequate sleep can cause us to feel tired, moody and unfocused. Getting a good night sleep is an essential requirement of being healthy.

What many people don't realise is that lack of sleep is associated with long term health issues, such as impaired blood glucose control, high blood pressure, weight gain, mood disorders and a shortened life expectancy!

Getting a good night sleep is an essential requirement of being healthy. Sleeping gives your body a chance to repair, replenish and renew. It helps you to maintain a healthy heart and cardiovascular system, improve stress coping mechanisms, enhance brain function, restore hormonal balance and strengthen your immune system.

Stages of Sleep

Sleep is divided into two core stages: Rapid Eye Movement (REM) and Non Rapid Eye Movement (non-REM), with each stage thought to have distinct physiological functions. When we fall asleep we start in non-REM sleep, which gradually gets deeper. It is difficult to be awakened from this deep sleep and when we are, we feel groggy. Our sleep then ascends to lighter REM sleep, where most of our dreaming occurs. REM sleep assists brain development and memory consolidation, with infants and children spending twice as long in REM sleep than adults. A healthy adult sleep cycle from non-REM to REM lasts about 90 minutes, and we spend longer in deep sleep at the beginning of the night, while the proportion of REM sleep increases later in the night, just before awakening.

How much Sleep?

Individual sleep requirements vary, but most people need between 7 and 9 hours per night. Concerns with sleep are not just limited to how many hours per night: restorative sleep only takes place when both REM and non-REM sleep cycles occur in the right

sequence for optimal durations. Alcohol, toxin overload and sleeping medications can disrupt your sleep cycles. The hours before midnight seem to be more beneficial, so an early bedtime can improve sleep quality.

Sleep Disorders

There are many factors that can affect sleep, including stress, anxiety, worry, pain or discomfort, certain medications, toxin overload, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, certain foods, and your sleeping environment. Insomnia has many faces and may involve:

- o Difficulty falling asleep (sleep onset insomnia)
- o Waking throughout the night (sleep maintenance insomnia)
- o Waking feeling unrefreshed (non restorative sleep)

Persistent insomnia is a sign that there is imbalance in the body and it is important to correct the cause, rather than just taking a sleeping pill (which can have serious side effects). There are many simple diet and lifestyle strategies that can help you get a good nights sleep.

Diet Strategies

As well as avoiding caffeine and alcohol, it is important to look at what you are eating in the evening. If you eat refined carbohydrates in the evening - found in white pasta, bread and rice, or sugars, in sweets, cakes and chocolates - they will raise your blood sugar levels, and this may make it hard for you to fall asleep. If you do get to sleep, the lowering of your blood sugar levels during the night can wake you and make it hard for you to get back to sleep. It is best to have a protein-based meal such as fish, chicken, lean red meat or eggs, with plenty of salad or

vegetables in the evening. If you are after an evening snack, opt for a handful of unsalted nuts such as almonds or walnuts, and a cup of relaxing, herbal tea. These protein-containing foods have the added benefit of being high in Tryptophan, an amino acid that is an essential ingredient in serotonin production. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps to promote sleep, and has been found to be low in people with sleep disorders.

Eating a large meal too close to bedtime is a recipe for sleep disaster! You should aim to finish eating 3 hours before bedtime. If your lifestyle doesn't allow this, you should have something very light for your evening meal.

Lifestyle Strategies

Stress has many negative health effects and is a major contributing factor in insomnia. When we are stressed our adrenal glands are activated and release hormones into our bloodstream. These hormones put our body into a high state of alert, which is beneficial to help us deal with the stress at hand. However, in today's fast-paced, modern world we are exposed to a myriad of stressors, which can lead an imbalance in our stress hormones and affect our sleep quality. Unfortunately much of our external stress is out of our control; work commitments and family pressures are a part of our life. So we must use strategies to help rebalance our stress hormones.

Regular exercise and relaxation is the key. You should aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week. This should be something you enjoy, such as walking along the beach, yoga, dance, swimming, running, or simply kicking the ball around with your children. Incorporating

relaxation into your life is also an essential ingredient in good health. Simply take a few long, deep breathes throughout the day, and also spend time each day doing something relaxing: listen to your favourite music or a meditation pod cast; walk barefoot on sand or grass; do some stretching; or take a long bath. These simple lifestyle changes will not only improve your sleep, but your overall wellbeing will be enhanced.

Organic Bedding

You go to sleep so that your body can rest and recuperate. It is during sleep that your body is best able to heal itself of the day's stressful influences.

In order to do that, it needs a sleeping environment that is as free from chemical pollutants as possible.

It is a simple fact that your body responds well to natural substances that have no chemical content or additives. Your body likes to be surrounded by products of Nature, which allow it to heal itself, naturally.

Many people suffering from allergies and a wide range of degenerative diseases, have yet to make the connection between their disease and the bedding they are using.

Those who are most in need of healing are often sleeping on bacteria-ridden old mattresses and pillows, and in synthetic (polyester) sheets, blankets and quilts.

Mr. Raithe Handiman, Blessed Earth reports: "These products are a recipe for sickness. As any Kinesiologist will explain, our body simply does not like being around them. They are stressful to our body and long-term stress

leads to sickness, in one form or another.

The other problem with synthetic substances is that they "out-gas". The chemicals in them vaporise, especially when exposed to bodily heat. What this means is that while we are trying to rest and heal, we are actually breathing in and absorbing through our skin, traces of chemicals that can make us ill.

Almost every day, we have someone telling us that they just spent \$000's on a synthetic mattress that they feel agitated on, or are overheating on. Latex, especially, causes overheating. It might be a natural substance when it comes out of the rubber tree, but it then has to be heated at great temperatures, triple-filtered to get the smell out, and then perforated to enable some sort of air flow.

Natural fibres, such as cotton and wool, are what our body loves. Here are the bedding solutions we offer to those seeking an all-natural alternative."

Wool mattresses are extremely comfortable and when properly constructed, maintain that comfort for many years. Organic cotton mattresses tend to be firmer but are often chosen by those who have extreme chemical sensitivities.

A wool topper is about 4cm thick and is the ideal choice for those who have a tired old mattress they are not ready to throw out.

Wool pillows maintain it's resilience for years, while cotton tends to pack down more. It's a matter of personal preference.

Organic cotton or wool quilts breathe wonderfully well, while providing snugness and warmth.

Sheets must be 100% organic cotton, as conventional cotton has been treated with so many chemicals. Avoid any polyester content.

With so many wonderful organic cotton and wool products now on the Australian market, there is no excuse for having bedding that is not made from organic, natural fibres.

Good health is our greatest asset.

Organic cotton and wool products

might cost a little more, but the extra cost is far outweighed by the wonderful benefits to our health and sense of wellbeing.

Top Tips for a Good Nights Sleep

- o Avoid caffeine found in coffee, tea, chocolate and cola for at least 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- o Limit alcohol consumption - it can help you get off to sleep but can cause you to wake in the night and reduce quality of sleep.
- o Avoid sugary foods and refined carbohydrates in the evening.
- o Try to go to bed and wake up at a regular time everyday.
- o Establish a soothing bedtime routine. Take a bath, read a book or practice relaxation exercises.
- o Create a sleep-inducing environment in your bedroom. It should be dark, quiet, cool and well ventilated. Ensure your mattress, pillow and bedding are comfortable and clean. it's always best to buy organic bedding to ensure healthy sleeping, chemical free. Keep televisions, computers and work materials out of the bedroom.
- o Regular exercise can help improve sleep quality, but try not to exercise too late in the evening because it has a stimulating effect.

o Magnesium supplementation can improve sleep by promoting relaxation.

o Herbal medicines such as valerian, chamomile, passionflower and hops can be beneficial. Naturopathy can help determine the best remedies for you and find the cause of any sleep issues. ■

Jessica Donovan is an Adelaide-based Naturopath, a specialist in live blood analysis, and the founder of Bounce Optimum Health & Wellbeing. She helps people achieve health and vitality using nutrition, lifestyle and natural medicines. Jessica specialises in correcting digestive disorders, female hormonal problems and children's health issues. For more information phone 0410 200 244 or go to our website www.bounceoptimumhealthandwellbeing.com

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