



Sleep Strategies: How to Get Quality Sleep & Improve Your Health

No doubt about it, sleep is foundational to our health! It's just as important as a healthy diet and regular exercise. It's estimated that a sleep-related issue affects 50-70 million Americans. Another statistic by the CDC showed that 1 in 3 adults do not get enough sleep and women are much more likely to report sleep related problems. If we want to optimize our health and wellness, then getting quality sleep is key.

The regulation of sleep is processed by the balance of the circadian rhythm, aka the "sleep/wake cycle." The term circadian is actually Latin for "around the day." Our circadian rhythm is the 24-hour internal clock in our brains that regulates cycles of alertness and sleepiness by responding to changes in our environment. What does all that mean? We function best physiologically and psychologically when our internal cycles are well-synchronized with those of the external world.

So, the question remains, how do we achieve better sleep?



Here are some sleep strategies:

1. Stick to a routine. Go to bed and rise around the same time each day.
2. Wind it down. Transitioning from warp speed or work issues to getting a good night's sleep takes some time. Create a nightly wind-down routine to signal your brain/body that it's time for bed. Try taking a bath, reading a book, or quietly meditating.
3. Good morning, sun! Getting natural light first thing in the morning helps regulate your hormones cortisol and melatonin (wake/sleep).
4. Get moving. Get routine exercise, but not too late in the day. Intense exercise late in the day can cause a spike in your cortisol when it should be declining. A spike can make it more difficult to fall asleep even a few hours later.
5. Curb your caffeine. Everyone metabolizes caffeine differently, but on average it takes 5-6 hours. That late afternoon latte could affect your sleep.
6. Eat early. Our digestion starts to slow in the evening. The later we eat the more difficult it is to digest our meal. This can lead to symptoms of fullness and reflux. Instead, aim to finish eating three hours prior to going to sleep to allow for adequate digestion.
7. Go easy on the alcohol. More than 1-2 drinks can lead to fragmented sleep which disrupts our REM stage. REM is associated with restorative sleep and a longer lifespan. Alcohol can also decrease our melatonin production and human growth hormone, which play key roles in our circadian rhythm.
8. Disengage. Turn off electronics at least one hour before bed. The blue light that's emitted from our electronics prevents the natural rise in melatonin (our sleep hormone). If it's absolutely necessary to be on your electronics, I suggest a nighttime app like Night Shift or blue light blocking glasses.
9. Clear your mind. Research shows that journaling or meditation before bed can reduce bedtime worry and stress, increase sleep time and improve quality of sleep.
10. Keep it cozy in the bedroom. Make your room cool and dark (blackout blinds are a great investment), and eliminate external noise for a best- sleep scenario.