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THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR SLEEP

Your physiological functions are dependent on a consistent sleep-wake cycle and affected by conflict when circadian rhythm and your sleep-wake cycle are out of sync. Therefore, sufficient and efficient sleep results in a healthy sleep which in turn is a determinant of good health. Lack of sleep impacts your metabolism which results in less energy. Energy powers everything you do from moving to thinking to growing. That means that sleep is vital for sustaining your body's physicality and cognitive abilities.

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Your body craves sleep in much the same way as it does eating, drinking, and breathing. Sleep is not a luxury; it is a necessity for your health and wellness.

In today's fast paced world, you might not think that you are allowed to take things slowly or get eight hours sleep per night. You might not even admit you are tired when so many people around you pride themselves on being able to get by on little sleep.

The way you feel while you're awake is very definitely related to what happens within your body while you are sleeping. If modern life deprives your mind and body of sleep you will eventually find yourself getting sick and deteriorating both physically and mentally. Insufficient sleep affects your emotions and pain thresholds; it impairs glucose metabolism and functioning of your digestive and immune system; it impacts the secretion of growth hormones; and leads to decreases in libido. Sleep deprivation can result in changes in your vital signs, like body temperature, breathing and heart rate, and blood pressure. Studies show that chronic sleep deprivation reduces cognitive abilities, impacts concentration, reduces IQ, and shortens life span. Therefore, experiencing consistent quality sleep at the right times can help protect your mental and physical health, quality of life, and safety.

You may be unconcerned about the pattern or quality of your sleep because you do not have a recognizable sleep disorder. Even so, it is possible that you are not actually experiencing the healthy sleep vital for sustaining your body's physicality and cognitive abilities, such as how you learn, remember, problem-solve, concentrate or even pay attention. You may have become accustomed to an irregular or random sleep pattern, like spending one or two days a week in a long slumber after a couple all-nighters. You may feel that your level of energy is okay and you may feel your physiological functions are working effectively, but feeling like you get an adequate night's sleep cannot be equated to actually experiencing and benefiting from the kind of consistent quality sleep your body requires to keep your brain and metabolism functioning effectively over the long term.

How do you know? If you cannot answer "usually or always" to the following questions, it is likely that you are not enjoying the benefits of a truly healthy sleep:

- Do you fall asleep easily?
- If you are awakened during the night do you get back to sleep easily?
- Do you sleep between six and eight hours per night?
- Do you go to bed and waking up at roughly the same time each day, including weekends?
- Do you consistently get a "good night's sleep"?
- Do you awake feeling alert and refreshed?
- Do you stay awake and alert throughout the day without dozing?
- Does your lifestyle allow you to sleep during the night?

If any of your answers were in the negative we recommend that you learn more about the changes you can make for better sleep health.

What can you do to minimize the impact of not sleeping well? For people who have had poor sleeping behaviours for years there are many day-to-day things that can be easily changed or adjusted by addressing sleep-related behaviours and thoughts. For some individuals, it might be challenging, but evidence does indicate that even in adverse conditions, sleep quality can be improved. Before we discuss the things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep let us examine the basics of sleep so you can better understand the mechanisms that control sleep and why lack of good sleep is harmful to your physical and mental state.

Your Biological Sleep Mechanisms

To understand sleep you need to know that your "sleep-wake cycle" is an automatic process involving two internally generated biological processes. Simply put, the first process is your need to sleep, called sleep drive or sleep pressure, and the second process is your biological clock which is called circadian rhythm. Sleep drive and circadian rhythm may be independent brain processes but they are genetically hard-wired to interact. This means neither sleep drive or circadian rhythm is within your voluntary control.

Ideally, for the two mechanisms to be able to do their work effectively you want them synchronized to reinforce each other. When your sleep-wake cycle is out of sync with the circadian rhythm your sleep health declines and the vital-to-life biological activities that take place during sleep can be dangerously affected.

Let's explore a little deeper.

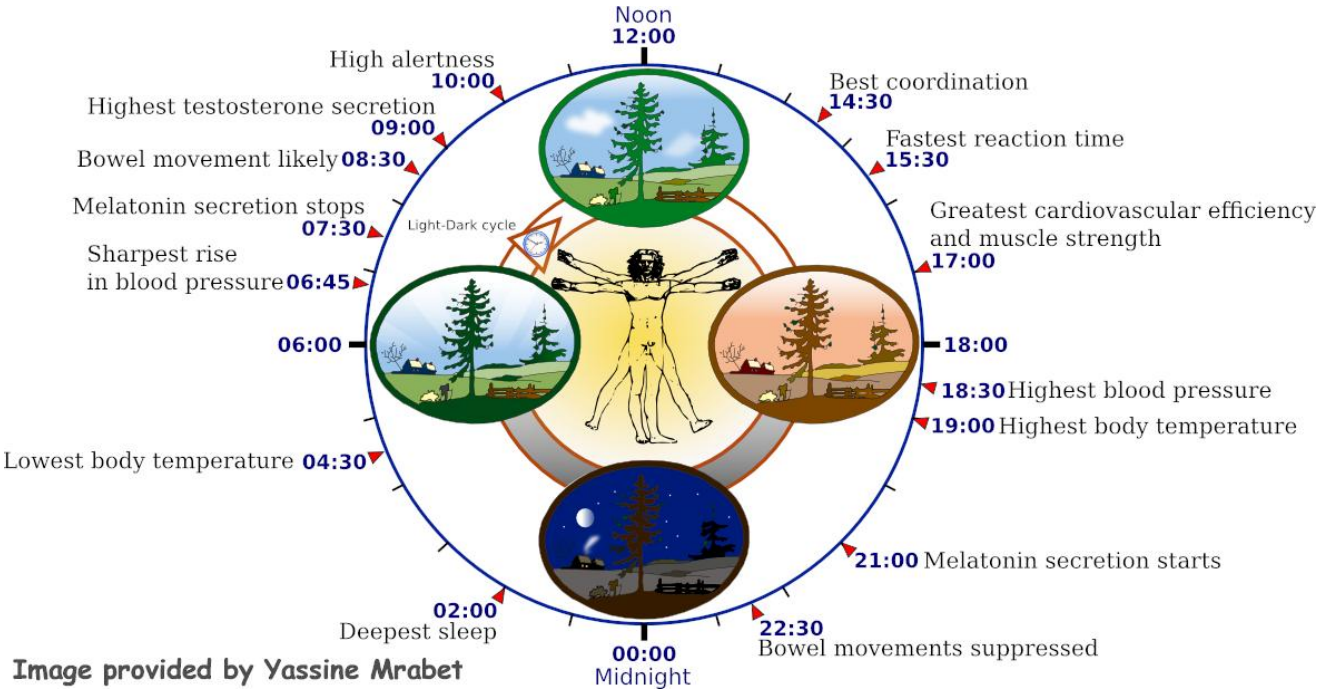
Your Need to Sleep – Sleep Drive

Sleep experts refer to the first process, sleep drive, as sleep-wake homeostasis. Think of it as and internal timer or counter that generates sleep drive and regulates sleep intensity. From the moment you awake your body begins to build up a need to sleep again. After a certain time the sleep-wake homeostasis intuitively reminds your body that it needs to sleep. The longer you are awake the stronger the need to sleep becomes and the probability of falling asleep increases. This pressure to sleep is only released by the act of sleeping itself. The longer you are asleep the pressure to sleep dissipates and the likelihood of awakening increases.

Ideally, you want sleep pressure to build to its high point at bedtime to coincide with your built-in circadian rhythm.

The Orderly Rhythm of the Universe and Circadian Rhythm

Like most living things, including plants, animals, and the tiniest microbes, human beings have adapted to the orderly rhythm of the universe, governed by mechanisms called circadian rhythms. The circadian rhythm is basically an internally generated 24-hour biological clock that regulates, organizes, and coordinates all your daily functioning to fit Earth's 24-hour solar day. Often terms like circadian cycle, circadian clock, biological clock, or body clock are used interchangeably in the context of explaining sleep patterns. The terms do differ, but for our purposes the difference isn't critical to understanding circadian rhythm.



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Circadian rhythms are persistent and they produce predictable changes over the course of hours, months, years and lifetimes. You can see evidence of this in plants. The circadian rhythm of a plant tells the plant what season it is, when to flower for the best chance of attracting insects to pollinate them, and can include leaf movement, growth, germination, enzyme activity, photosynthetic activity, and the emission of fragrance.

In almost all life forms, including humans, the most vital and persistent changes occur over a solar cycle of within a minute or two of twenty-four hours. You see this instinctive orderly circadian rhythm in mould reproducing on bread, hummingbirds and bees searching out nectar during the day, the feeding and sleeping patterns of animals, and plants opening and closing their flowers at the same hour each day.

Your circadian rhythm is an elaborate process. Along with regulating your feeding pattern, core body temperature and the multitude of physiological functions that keep your body alive and healthy, circadian rhythm regulates your sleep pattern. Independent of the amount of preceding sleep or wakefulness, circadian rhythm is driven in part by the day-night/light-dark cycle of the solar day and thus senses environmental time cues. The primary cue is light. In fact, the circadian rhythm is reset each day to link astronomical time with an organism's internal time. That means that even a long sleep for you may be ineffective if it occurs at the "wrong" time within the circadian cycle.

The Master Timekeeper

Independent circadian rhythms are found in many organs and tissues in your body. Each one controls the 24-hour vital-to-life phenomena of its host. One self-sustained primary clock is responsible for controlling all circadian rhythms. It is called the suprachiasmatic nuclei (SCN) and it is located in the cherry sized hypothalamus region of your brain. Think of the primary clock as the internal master pacemaker and the independent circadian rhythms as peripheral oscillators.

The master pacemaker maintains control across 100% of your body by synchronizing these oscillating rhythms throughout the solar cycle of twenty-four hours. It's a sophisticated job of multi-tasking to regulate all circadian rhythms to an oscillation that is essential to maintaining life, like with your heart, kidneys, brain, oesophagus, lungs, liver, pancreas, spleen, thymus, arteries, and skin. Working at their prime, the cells and organs in your body are like a well-timed finely-tuned organic machine keeping your brain and metabolism working at their best to maintain a constant state synchronized to circandian rhythm.

Why Sleep Matters

Let's focus on the circadian rhythm in humans and how it works, specifically during the solar cycle of a day. As the day progresses your need to sleep builds, and eventually falling asleep is virtually out of your control. You may cognitively override these hard-wired processes, thinking you can beat the dictates of the circadian rhythm. You cannot. More importantly, you should not.

Your physiological functions are dependent on a consistent sleep-wake cycle and affected by conflict when circadian rhythm and your sleep-wake cycle are out of sync. Therefore, sufficient and efficient sleep results in a healthy sleep which in turn is a determinant of good health. Lack of sleep impacts your metabolism which results in less energy. Energy powers everything you do from moving to thinking to growing. That means that sleep is vital for sustaining your body's physicality and cognitive abilities.

Your body houses a complex system of physiological functions that keep you alive:

- Every cell in your body has its own job to do.
- Virtually every cell, tissue, and organ in your body has its own innate timing device or circadian rhythm.
- Circadian rhythm follows a pattern of a nearly 24-hour cycle, a light/dark cycle that is determined by the earth's 24-hour solar rotation.
- All physiological functions in your body are governed by circadian rhythm.
- One of these functions is sleep pattern.
- The hormone melatonin is largely responsible for regulating your sleep and wakefulness on a daily basis as well as seasonally. Melatonin is produced in your pineal gland. The production of melatonin is synchronized to your circadian rhythm. Its rate of production is dictated by natural light. At night, the master pacemaker alerts the brain to make more melatonin so you get drowsy. With the coming of daylight, melatonin production ebbs.
- All physiological functions in your body are interconnected.
- Physiological functions are dependent on your having a consistent sleep-wake cycle and are affected by conflict when circadian rhythm and your sleep-wake cycle are out of sync.
- Most of the predictable changes in your human body are governed by cycles of chemical signals and hormonal activity that are reacting to environmental inputs such as light, feeding, and temperature.
- A self-sustained primary master clock in your brain is the internal pacemaker that regulates all circadian rhythms to keep them in sync throughout a twenty-four hour period of the planet's rotation around the sun.
- In that time your body is either preparing for and sustaining these processes: oxygen consumption, cardiovascular activation, cell repair and regeneration, core body temperature, renal filtration, digestion, brain wave activity, hormone production, nutrient

mobilization, all the metabolic reactions, all the activity of endocrine glands, and any other physiological process critical to maintaining your life.

- Sleep is the only time in which your brain is able to wash away the build-up of the toxic by-products of cell metabolism, the waste protein that has accumulated over the day and can build up and cause dementia.
- Sleep is the only time that your brain can organize everything you have learned and experienced.
- When sleep pressure and circadian rhythm reinforce each other, the result is healthy sleep which helps maintain your healthy mind and body.
- If you have no sleep, or insufficient sleep, these critical processes are not able to do their work effectively.
- Eventually, depriving yourself of sleep results in a decline in your sleep health, which can adversely affect your physical and mental well-being. Mild symptoms, signalling poor health or mental awareness, can progress to serious and life-threatening physical and mental conditions for you.
- Disruption of the circadian rhythm has been linked to various sleep disorders, such as insomnia. Abnormal circadian rhythms have also been associated with obesity, diabetes, depression, bipolar disorder and seasonal affective disorder.

So, how long can you survive without sleep? How long a human being can go without sleep remains unanswered by research. What we do know is that countless studies, relating to partial sleep deprivation, indicate that damaging side effects would only deteriorate further by prolonged sleep deprivation. Therefore, it is most unwise to ignore your need for sleep. There is no substitute for sleep.

Dance in Time to Your Circadian Rhythm to Become a Healthy Sleeper

You may try to override the circadian rhythms, but will never come out ahead if you expect your body to adjust and keep functioning at its best. You simply cannot create your own rhythm. You cannot separate sleep pressure from the circadian rhythm, but you can adjust your sleep-related behaviours and thoughts to the dictates of the circadian rhythm in relation to the time of day, month, or year. Both sleep pressure and the circadian rhythm can be brought under your control to ensure that sleep pressure builds to its high point at bedtime and that you sleep for six to eight hours.

To wake feeling refreshed you need 6-8 hours of quality sleep each day. To perform at your best you may need more. Athletes who rely on their energy supplies to perform to the best of their ability may benefit from more sleep than the average person. Waking from a good night's sleep you experience a substantial cognitive boost as well as energy. That is because during sleep the body actually shuts down to repair and refresh itself.

Do not be afraid to take time out to look after yourself. When it comes to sleep, you should plan on it everyday. After all, no one else can sleep for you.

How much are you sleeping? Can you add one more hour of sleep? Can you improve the quality of your sleep? Maybe you are not getting a quality sleep because you have become accustomed to a routine or atmosphere unfavourable to good sleep. A few simple changes might make a world of difference.

Your circadian rhythm may differ slightly from your siblings, parents, or partner and it might change slightly as you get older, but like other humans your circadian rhythm maintains a roughly 24-hour periodicity. It works best when you maintain a reliable routine of going to bed at night and waking up in the morning around the same times. This includes weekends. It is up to you to maintain a regular sleep/wake schedule. To do so, you may have to spend time developing better sleep habits. It may be a minor modification to your routine like opening the shades and standing in the sunshine for a few minutes or brushing your hair for an extra minute in the day. It might be something slightly more difficult such as making your bed or putting your technology to sleep early. Why wouldn't you want to make a few adjustments in your life if they help you to sleep well which in turn enhances your cognitive ability, sustains good health and adds to the quality of your life!

Choosing Optimal Sleep Should be an Easy Decision

Change does start with your awareness. Still, sleep is so critical you must do more than simply recognize when you are alert or drowsy. You not only have to pay closer attention to your circadian rhythm and your body's alerting system, you have to choose to make adjustment to create optimal time for sleep.

Begin with the three of the most important changes:

1. The most important aspect to any sleep routine is consistency—going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time each day to help your body maintain its rhythm
2. Plan to sleep for at least six to eight hours per night.
3. Choose to go to sleep at or near the same time each night, and set your alarm to wake up at the same hour each morning. If you have been sleeping for less than six hours per night, it might best to aim for seven to eight hours sleep.

Keep in mind that if your sleep-wake cycle has been irregular or upset it may take a few days for the endogenous rhythm to become synchronized again. This could be because of long term habits like having several late nights or jet lag from a quick flight across country.

Two Key things to avoid:

1. **Avoid the last minute all-nighters.** It is counterproductive and unhealthy to cram all studying into a short period of time. If you simply must do some last minute cramming, instead of staying up all night it is best to make sure you get at least four to five yours of sleep and get up early in the morning to study.
2. **Avoid sleeping in until noon.** Sleeping late may seem like a luxury, but it is doing you no favour. Aim for consistency in when you go to sleep and what time you wake up. This includes weekends. Besides helping to maintain your body's rhythm, it also has an additional health benefits. Research has repeatedly supported the link between adequate sleep (7 to 8 hours) and a healthy body weight and that those who have consistent sleep schedules also have a lower percentage of body fat.

How to Induce a Great Sleep

Many things affect sleep or lead you toward a good sleep – how you organize your morning or sleep environment, how you prepare to sleep, and when you eat or exercise, to name a few. In citing several influences we have compiled recommendations from several sleep experts and sources. As you read the next section, examine your sleep schedule and habits and decide what things you will modify or change to optimize your opportunities to sleep better.

1. Start the Day Right

The time to prepare for sleep is when you wake up. Therefore, how you organize your morning environment is important:

- Wake up at the same time every morning. To create a routine, you may have to start by setting an alarm.
- Face the sunshine. As soon as you wake up open the shades and bask in the natural light of the morning sunshine to reset your body's circadian rhythm. Spending a minimum of fifteen minutes in the sunlight in the morning is ideal.
- Eat breakfast every morning. Start the day by doing one simple thing like eating breakfast by the window or, better yet eating, outdoors in fresh air. Include a protein-rich food. Protein enhances your metabolism.
- Make your bed. This serves as an internal message that you will welcome sleep when it is time to go to bed at night.

2. Daytime Reinforcement

Everything you do between opening your eyes in the morning to when your head hits the pillow at night guides you toward a good sleep. Everything! To induce good sleep you can introduce simple behavioural changes to your daily routine:

- Evening or late night exercise may actually get in the way of a good sleep. Exercising in the morning or at lunch is better to increase your daytime metabolism.
- Cut the caffeine based beverages. The effects of caffeine can linger for four hours, or even longer for some individuals.
- If you nap do so before three in the afternoon and keep it under thirty minutes duration. A power-nap, does not have any measurable effect on normal circadian rhythms, but can decrease stress and that certainly leads to a better sleep.

- Add true rest and relaxation into your daily schedule. More information about rest and relaxation are included at the end of this section.
- Whenever possible spend time outdoors. Six hours per day outside is ideal.

3. Wind Down with Evening Preparation

Your evening and night-time environment cannot be ignored.

- Exposure to bright lights in the hours shortly before bedtime can overwhelm your circadian rhythm's sleep signal, making it more difficult to fall asleep. Light suppresses the melatonin you need to sleep and bright lights make your brain think it is still daylight.

    a) As darkness approaches use dimmers and lamps instead of bright lights.

    b) Minimize your exposure to light in the blue-ish part of the spectrum that is found in your modern technology like cell phones, computers, and television. You may want to consider using glasses designed to block out blue and green light when using your computer or phone in the last couple of hours leading up to bedtime.

    c) Put your technology to sleep first, at least thirty minutes earlier than your planned bed time. It is better to wind down without technology.

- Keep baths or showers warm, not hot.
- Lower the temperature of your room before you go to sleep to mimic the natural night-time drop in your body temperature. The core mechanisms of circadian rhythm are sensitive to temperature, and temperature can alter the rate at which most biological processes take place. The ideal temperature for sleep 65-68 degrees Fahrenheit or 18-20 degrees Celsius.
- Avoid large meals before bedtime. If you are awakened in the night by pangs of hunger try having a very light snack like yogurt or fruit before you go to bed.
- Do something relaxing for at least thirty minutes before bedtime, but choose wisely.

- Go to bed at the same hour every night. At the very least, try not to vary it by more than an hour. It's better to go to bed earlier because the more you are sleeping when it's dark, the better.

- Plan to wake up when you can not sleep any longer or with an alarm after you have had at least six to eight hours of sleep.

4. Optimal Sleep Zone

Many people underestimate the significance of their surroundings when it comes to a good night's sleep. Sleep experts tell us that sleep is most definitely affected by your sleeping environment. Your bedroom should be your sanctuary for peaceful relaxation that leads to a good night's sleep, so make it that way:

- Do not use your bed for other activities such as reading, watching television or listening to music. Your bed is for sleeping.

- Embrace silence – remove all TVs, computers, radios, and telephones from the bedroom. Block out common household or neighbourhood sounds. If you cannot control the surroundings to have a silent sleep environment use earplugs or consider using something that produces ambient white noise to block out the disturbing sounds of traffic, train horns, slamming doors, barking dogs or other things that disturb your sleep. There is technology made for that purpose. A simple fan or air purifier might work for you.

- Use light correctly – since your body's natural rhythm is cued to light and darkness you will sleep better and wake up more naturally if your bedroom lighting mimics the natural light-dark sleep.

  Keep your bedroom dark when you go to sleep. Complete darkness – that means no night light. You may want to consider using blackout shades or a sleep mask that keeps all light out of your eyes.

  Make it gradually lighter as it gets closer to waking time. Depending on where you live this may be as simple as leaving your blinds open to let the natural morning light flow in. However, if you need to keep blinds closed to block out street lights you can use a light timer to set a light to come on to match your wake-up time.

- A room that is too hot will interfere with your body's natural dip in body temperature associated with sleep. Using air conditioning, fans, or cooling pillows designed for such a purpose can help. When you are unable to keep a room cool, you can cover yourself with a wet cloth or sleep in a dampened t-shirt.

- No intrusions – no electronic devices, no cell phone, no pets. If you awaken during the night, don't look at the clock or any light source. This is very important. If you need to go to the bathroom, do so in minimal light.
- Make sure your mattress is comfortable – a mattress that is too firm or too soft results in lack of proper support for your body, which results in back and/or neck pain. Try out mattresses of different firmness levels and different materials. Take your time testing them before you decide.
- No movement of the bed. Stabilize your bed.
- Make sure your pillows are comfortable and clean.
- Make sure your bedding is clean and changed frequently.
- De-clutter your sanctuary.
- Surrounding yourself with smells you love will help you sleep better. Simply sprinkle a few drops of your favorite fragrance on a tissue and place it under or near your pillow. You can use an aromatherapy diffuser. Explore the various fragrances or oils and how they benefit sleep. Some fragrances are not conducive to good sleep.
- Make a personalized pin board of quotes, pictures, or photographs that inspire you.
- Make your bed – simple, not too time-consuming; mundane, but important. Make your bed and you accomplish the first task of the day. It not only makes your room look neater, completing that one task gives you a small sense of pride and encourages you to complete another chore and then another. That simple task of making your bed underlines that, in life, small things can matter. Think of it this way: if you cannot accomplish a simple thing like making your bed, how will you tackle some of the more difficult tasks? Making your bed serves as an internal sign that you will welcome sleep when it is time, and when it is time to sleep turning down the covers is another ritual that welcomes sleep.

Re-engineer your day for Rest and Relaxation
Downtime Leads to a More Restful Sleep

You likely want to give it your best at school or work. To do so you have to be functioning at your best and that means you need rest, relaxation, and sleep, not one or the other. Have you ever caught yourself dozing in class, during a meeting, or behind the wheel of a car? Have you ever found yourself unable to concentrate? Just like the signals of sleep drive, your body tells you when it needs downtime.

From dusk to dawn various influences affect how your body's systems function, and these also have an effect on how you sleep at night. Making time for rest and relaxation at various times during the day can make a lot of difference in keeping your system relaxed. That means you could be physically exhausted, but it would be less stressful which then translates to your body being better prepared to sleep. Re-engineer your entire day to find time to have frequent periodic calm and also to unwind and relax.

Is there a difference between rest and relaxation? Yes there is. Rest and relaxation work hand in hand to remove the tightness from your body and the stress from your mind, but there is a difference.

Rest

Rest is a period of physical inactivity when you take time to calm your mind and let your muscles and organs recover and recharge. You do not need to lie down; you can break from the hectic pace and pressure of daily life by simply closing your eyes and quieting your thoughts to give your neurons a break from the busyness of doing, thinking, or being engaged in activity. Taking a restful break does not require a big chunk of time and most of them can be accomplished at any time of the day or at any place. Frequent rests throughout the day will not only reduce stress that prepares you for a better nights sleep, they will energize you and give you a cognitive boost.

There may be days when you can make time to stroll in the park, get away to a quiet corner to eat lunch alone or read, but when time seems at a premium you can still engage in a state of calm by adding some of these one-minute or five-minute calming techniques to your daily routine:

Take One: De-Stress with a Quick Break

You can lie down and doing nothing for one minute, but when that is not feasible a comfortable change of body position is important. Take one minute to engage in one of the following:

- Do nothing but stare out the window. Study a tree, or see life in high definition or slow motion.
- Stand tall and proud with a power pose.
- Count backwards – choose a number at random and start counting.
- Perform a deep-breathing exercises.
- Look in the mirror and make funny faces.
- De-stress your muscles with a body scrunch. Take a deep breath and squeeze all the muscles in your body into a compact bundle. Hold that scrunch for ten seconds, relax with some deep breaths and repeat the move.

- Spend an extra minute at the sink to run cool water over your wrists.
- Slowly drink water and think about nothing but your appreciation of Mother Nature.
- Do some easy stretches several times a day. Sometimes simply reaching for the stars or slowly shrugging your shoulders can relieve you of tightness. Mimic the stretching motions of cat.
- Close your eyes and massage the edges of your scalp, across your forehead to your eyebrows.
- Brush your hair.
- Get or give a good long hug.
- Pause to smell some lemons or flowers or coffee.
- It's okay to do your own thing.

Take Five: Chill Out – "Me" Time is Rest Time"

In task-related activities that increase energy expenditure your body regularly releases adrenaline and cortisol which can result in muscle tension.

- Do nothing but be in the sunshine for five minutes.
- Stretch. Recoup energy with a five to ten minute stretching routine that works for you.
- Satisfy your taste buds. Brew your favorite tea, peel and slice some fruit and savour the taste
- Listen to music, playing at a slow rhythm.
- Meditate – two bouts of silent meditation per day is all you need.

Relaxation

Relaxation occurs while you are awake and usually entails engaging in enjoyable activities. Relaxation is rejuvenating. It can be a five minute break for "me" time at various times throughout the day or a couple of spirited hours spent with friends watching or playing sports or a board game. Down time reduces stress or anxiety, improves mood and cognitive functioning, boosts your immunity, improves your ability to cope with adversity and is significant in leading you toward a better night's sleep. Make down-time a priority by introducing relaxation strategies into your daily routine.

- Sing a song or listen to music you like .
- Dance.
- Engage in a hobby.
- Play card or board games.
- Pamper yourself.
- Keep an inspirational or funny book of short stories, anecdotes, quotes, poems, or trivia handy for easy access when your relaxation alarm beeps.
- Give yourself a hand massage starting at the wrist and working your way to your fingertips.
- Give yourself a foot massage by rubbing your feet back and forth over a golf ball.
- Explore the wonders of something new.

Rest and Relaxation for Stress Reduction

Investing in periods of rest and relaxing pursuits is particularly important when you are having a stressful day both mentally and physically. Your brain takes a heavy hit from chronic stress, persistent overwork, a hectic and energy-draining lifestyle, and anything that lessens your attention span or makes you feel frazzled and dull-witted. You should be attentive to how much stress is caused from hurrying or working too hard and how it affects your sleep cycle.

- Breathing and stretching exercises can calm your frazzled brain and reduce levels of stress.
- Socializing, laughter, and love all reduce stress.
- Concentrate on clenching the muscles in one part of your body for five to ten seconds, and relax for thirty. Start with your toes and gradually work your way through the muscle groups up to your neck and head, including the tiny ones in your face. Alternately, it feels good to clench each muscle in sequence until your whole body is clenched. Hold that and then slowly release to let go of all the tension. It feels good.
- Being more observant more often helps your mind perceive things from a different or creative perspective.

Put Rest and Relaxation on your Daily Agenda

We live in a work-driven culture where relaxation is perceived as unproductive. Chilling out or pausing to unwind is hardly unproductive since there is significant value how rest and relaxation help us sleep better and also keep us healthy and happy.

It is probably safe to assume that a huge part of your day is scheduled – getting to classes or work on time, meeting deadlines, doing what you are paid to do, or doing what you think is expected at home or with friends. Schedules are an effective tool for keeping your life organized or making sure you get things done so why not make sure you also focus your attention on ways to enjoy life that also help you stay more cognitively alert and sleep better at night. Put rest and relaxation on your daily agenda.

Do you need a reminder to chill out once in a while? Set an alarm for random times of the day so you will be reminded to stop and take a moment for yourself, even if all you do is indulge in simple appreciation of what surrounds you.

Could it be that you are too anxious to relax? Worry causes stress and can be counterproductive to relaxation. Try scheduling an anxiety break into your day – fifteen minutes to write down your worries and work through them so that you can stop thinking about them in the evening.

Unwind with your Joy List

Think about the last time you did something truly joyful or mellow? When you are suddenly faced with free time are you able to engage in an activity that truly mellows you out or energizes you? People find different things relaxing. Wouldn't it be wonderful to make a "Joy List" identifying the perfect things you would like to do, so when you do have leisure time something on your "Joy List" will look appealing! Every day you could pick something new to do.

Pause to Unwind Before Bedtime

Doing something relaxing for at least thirty minutes before bedtime is very crucial. But choose wisely. Not everything we humans do is ideal for sleep and should be avoided. For example, heavy exercise may tire you, but it does not induce good sleep. Accessing the TV, laptop, cell phone, or tablet in bed is definitely not good for sleep. You may not be aware of how the light may be keeping you awake. Stop multi-tasking. Avoid stressful things that will keep you from sleeping. This includes long hours of study. It's better to plan to study in the morning or curtail study by early evening. If you must study or doing something mentally stressful you should plan for at least thirty minutes of time afterward to relax and relieve physical tension.

To better prepare you for seven hours of good sleep you could.

- Create instant daydream or visualization moments. Imagine opening the door to a hero or idol and what you might say to each other. Pause and mindfully consider a particular word or phrase, something like the word "pleasure" or a phrase like "my favourite toy" and enjoy where the images and thoughts take you.
- Do things that let you laugh out loud
- Cuddle a pet.
- Soak in a warm tub of water.
- Talk to a friend.
- Plan your next vacation.

Sleep is a Biological Necessity

Feeling tired should never be considered normal. Like eating and breathing, sleep is a biological necessity. Since it has an impact on every aspect of your health it only makes sense that you should make sleep health a priority. To benefit from healthy sleep, your sleep wake cycle should be in sync with circadian rhythm, and you should get 6-8 hours sleep every night, going to sleep and waking at approximately the same times.

Caution: If you have difficulty sleeping do not ignore the possibility of a sleep disorder, or even inflammation (recent research indicates that underlying inflammation can derail circadian rhythm), interfering with you getting a good night's sleep.

Because there are many important connections between health and sleep you should make sure you check with your doctor to determine if you have a sleep disorder that can be treated. People usually are not aware of their breathing and movements while sleeping and do not think to talk to their doctors about issues that might be related to sleep problems. Your doctor might not detect a sleep problem during a routine office visit because you are awake.

After reviewing this guide you should have a better understanding how your thoughts, activities, and behaviour patterns are connected to how well you sleep. You now have more knowledge to analyze your sleep pattern and your activities in order to make adjustments in your daily activities so that you will enjoy a better sleep at night.

Sure there are challenges because making any kind of change to break a poor habit isn't always easy, but life does get better by change, even small ones. Where will you start?

Inspired and Committed, We Celebrate Your Journey

At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success