

SOME INGREDIENTS FOR RESTFUL SLEEP

Every tissue and organ of the body needs sleep to rest and repair. Until the end of grad school, I had no experience of sleeplessness; sleep deprivation sure, but no trouble falling asleep. But since the spring of 2007, reeling from three years of sustained abuse of my own body-mind during school, my sleep went off the rails. Now, when things are out of balance, or stress is particularly high, sleep is still an Achilles heel. It's one of the places imbalance shows up. And SO, I've had plenty of opportunity to experiment with this challenge from the inside out.

According to the NIH, adequate sleep is critical for cell-to-cell communication, regulating metabolism, our brain's ability to lay down memory and optimize concentration. I've included a few resources that detail these impacts. There are assuredly more up to date podcasts. If you've suffered disturbed sleep for awhile, I find it important for us to take ourselves a bit earnestly by the hand, like a small child needing a bit of guidance, and apply the things below:

- Discipline regarding sleep hygiene.
- Observe the mind's tendency to become anxious about not being able to sleep.
- Assure you are going to sleep neither hungry nor too full.
- Incorporate practices like the River Rock Practice, the Bowl exercise, or Binaural beats.

When I do this for 3-7 days consistently, things get back on track. In the rare circumstance when this doesn't work, it's generally a time of acute emotional processing (grief, change). I sustain my effort, sometimes seek out assistance from other providers, and get the support I need. I hope these ideas will support you to find your own prescription for optimizing sleep.

Basic sleep hygiene – simple steps that optimize sleep

- **Moderate fluids** after 6pm to prevent or decrease night time urination.
- **Food & Metabolism:** Eat early enough so your belly isn't overfull at bedtime. It's also important not to go to bed hungry. If you exercise at night or have high metabolism, eat a small snack, high protein, before bed. Low blood sugar can trigger a flood of stress hormones and agitation as the body tries to wake up looking for food.
- **Moderate caffeine and other stimulants after noon** (the timing and limits on this are very individual. Test things out in the laboratory of your own body.
- **Have bed/bedroom be only for sleep** (and sex), just not TV and work and eating etc. etc.
- **Our bodies thrive with regular to bed and waking up.**
- **Slow down the last hour before bed** (unplug from social media, conclude work projects, bill paying etc). Even the light from kindles and tablets have been found to mess with sleep. You're an adult. You can choose any of the above. Simply know that if you also want deep and restorative sleep, a different choice will support that ultimate goal and your overall health.
- **Create an evening ritual** (could include reading, a bath, some gentle yoga or Tai Chi or meditation, aromatherapy, incense, all indicators to the body it's time for rest). You can even make a list and keep it close to your sleeping space.

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- [Body Scan to Prepare for sleep](#) or [River Rock Practice](#) (MP3 available on the Resources page).
- **Binaural Beats:** Recordings available via [Youtube, ex here](#) are really helpful. While they are supposedly best in earbuds, I find them perfectly effective on a low volume on a tablet close to the bed. You can plug in when you stir unable to sleep in the middle of the night, or plug in before bed and allow them to lull you to sleep all night.
- **Try to limit intense/charged conversations before bed.** Sometimes it's unavoidable. So then, have realistic expectations sleep will be impacted. We can all survive a single night of poor sleep. Our bodies are designed to manage. Prolonged and chronic sleeplessness have more adverse consequences.
- **Gentle sleep aids:** I am not advising supplementation without consultation. It is best to consult with a provider before trying anything. Some people have found these helpful: Rescue remedy. Lavender pills. Lavender or Chamomile tea. Timed release melatonin.

Sleep Visualization Exercise for the agitated hamster cage mind.

This can be helpful either before you go to bed or upon waking in the middle of the night with the mind circling like a hamster cage. Different minds and personalities will find it useful in different ways. Explore the practice, tweak it to make it work for you.

1. Place a small decorative bowl beside your bed with small notepad or pieces of paper and pen. If your mind is doing acrobatics, write the primary thought in a few key words, not a paragraph. Fold up the paper. Place in the bowl saying to yourself, "I need to sleep now. I can attend to this in the morning."
OR
2. Beside the bowl, place the image of someone you deeply trust. This could be a person, alive or transitioned. It could be an expression of the divine, a pet, a teddy bear. Same practice. Encapsulate the concern in a few words on a piece of paper. Fold and place in the bowl while invoking this trusting presence and saying, "_____, I need to rest. Please *hold* this for me."
OR
3. Don't worry about the bowl, paper or image. As the mind is turning, simply invoke the trusting presence to hold whatever is in your heart-mind and say, "_____, I need to rest. Please *hold* this for me."

Resources of Interest

Freconomics Series on Sleep

<http://freakonomics.com/podcast/the-economics-of-sleep-part-1-a-new-freakonomics-radio-episode/>

Harvard Medical School

Analysis of Impacts of Sleep, fascinating interactive component outlining historical evolution of some views on sleep in the Western World, highlights studies including those examining sleep deficit impact on hormone regulation and carbohydrate metabolism.

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters>

Huffington Post on the Consequences of Sleep Deprivation

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/derek-kren/the-consequences-of-sleep-deprivation-that-will-keep-you-up-at-night_b_9742376.html

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