



*I developed this handout for people who have received context for their sleep-related lifestyle medicine habits: my coaching/healing clients and Meditation & Resiliency students. This file is not intended for broad distribution nor for others to post on social media. Please contact me at: [info@annieweisbrod.com](mailto:info@annieweisbrod.com) **Sleep Well!!***

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## Tips and Skills for Better Sleep

### What is sleep?

Sleep is an essential dynamic process for the brain and body to repair, restore, and recalibrate. It is **governed by a circadian rhythm of light/dark, hormones, and temperature**. There are characteristic changes (*electroencephalographic*) in the brain during sleep that are species-specific; humans have different sleep duration, postures, and pattern than dogs, cats, whales, birds, etc. *Sleep is NOT simply rest.*

### What does sleep affect?

#### **1. Brain function. Consolidates Learning, Memory + Insight**

- Integrates new info & emotional responses into LT memory
- Makes novel connections (REM)

#### **2. Emotion Function. Regulates Mood & Emotional reactions**

- Increases calm, empathy, adaptability

#### **3. Body Function. Restores the Body**

- Repairs muscles and tissues
- Strengthens the immune system
- Regulates hormones: growth, fertility, stress, appetite, weight, metabolism...
- Rests + regulates heart, breath, blood pressure (CV health)
- Flushes metabolic waste (e.g., beta-amyloid, linked to Alzheimer's)

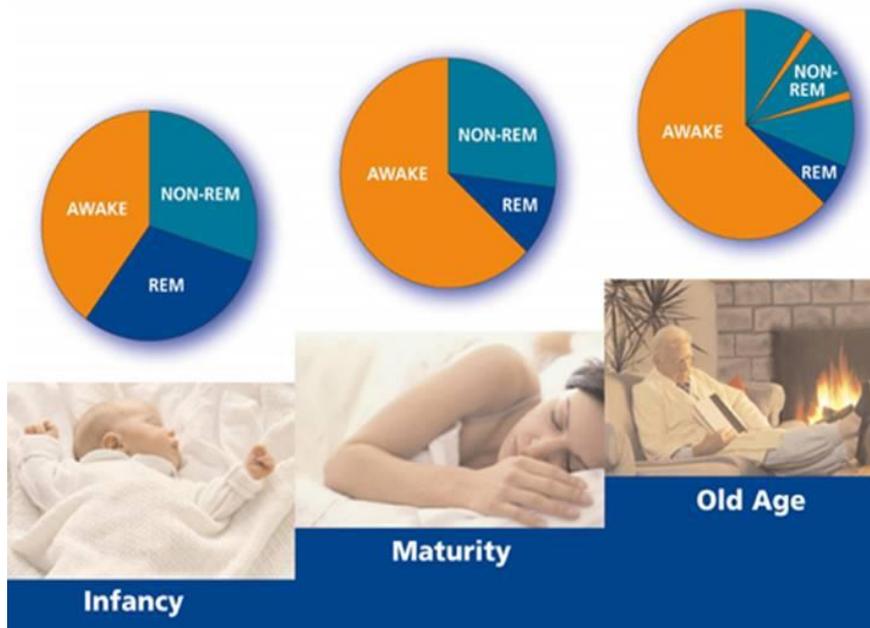
### Sleep Pattern

- People have 4 stages in the sleep cycle, which repeats 4-6X each night (each cycle is 2-4 hours). There are 3 stages of NREM (Non-Rapid Eye Movement), and 1 stage of REM (Rapid Eye Movement),
  - The first two phases (N1, N2) are light sleep, and it's easy to wake up. The third stage (N3) is restorative, deep, and difficult to wake up from. The heart and breathing rates slow down, and the brain has slow consistent waves (delta).
  - The fourth stage is REM, when we dream, the muscles are temporarily paralyzed and our heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure are irregular (recalibrating).
- As we age, we naturally have less REM, more awake time, and quicker cycles. It is normal that sleep pattern changes as we mature – how we sleep as children is different from young adulthood and older ages. Thus, waking up in the middle of the night can be normal, not necessarily insomnia.



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- Accept the 'new normal' for sleep pattern as you mature. Instead of wishing you could sleep like a baby, it works better to **adopt 'age appropriate' sleep habits.**



- Historically, mature people would use their awake time at night to reflect on their dreams, pray, interact with spouse or child or pet, walk the perimeter of camp... The natural dark period is up to 14-hours, which is when we slept and rested.

### **What disrupts normal sleep, our circadian rhythm (at any age)?**

- Stimulants – **light**, caffeine, decongestants, nicotine... exercise close to bedtime
- Alcohol and/or a large meal close to bedtime
- Insufficient relaxation, overscheduling throughout the day
- Lack of exercise
- Sleeping environment – light, noise, heat, uncomfortable
- \*Menstrual hormones, menopause = lower progesterone...
- \*Medications – beta blockers...
- \*Painful conditions – arthritis, congestive heart failure...
- \*Mental disorders – anxiety, bipolar, schizophrenia, depression...
- \*Sleep disorders – insomnia, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, narcolepsy...

*\*Please consult your doctor about these.*



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## What are the effects of sleep deprivation?

Studies also show that today, quite a few people are chronically sleep-deprived, which has detrimental physiological and cognitive consequences. Adults (18-64 years old) need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Different periods of development (younger ages) require more. Not taking your good sleep seriously affects more than you: *20% of car accidents and 50-100K hospital deaths per year, and disasters like the Challenger explosion and Exxon Valdez oil spill, are blamed on people with sleep deprivation.*

### **Short-term**

- Groggy, lethargic
- Greater likelihood of car accidents... *Slower reaction time, Microsleep/dozing off, Short attention span*
- Impaired memory (brain health)
- Irritable, increased sensitivity to pain
- Anxiety / stress – increases emotional reactivity (*amygdala*), reduces emotional regulation (*prefrontal cortex*)
- Relationship stress (impacts emotions - 'moody')
- 

### **Additional Long-Term health effects**

- Increased risk of high blood pressure, cardiac arrest, stroke
- Hormonal imbalances, increased cortisol ... *obesity, lower sex drive, inflammation, impaired immunity*
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Premature aging (wrinkles)



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## What are the best practices for Sleep Hygiene?

### During the Day - Eliminate what keeps/wakes you up

- Exercise regularly! Go outside (sunlight)! Finish exertions 2+ hours before bedtime.
  - Relax for 3+ min at various times during day (SNS – PNS)
- Finish meals 2+ hours before bedtime...
  - A light snack is OK (<200 calories). Some foods help with sleep: *milk, yogurt, banana, grapes, tart cherries, oatmeal, leafy greens, egg, turkey, almonds, walnuts...*
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine after 2 pm.
  - Caffeine can stay in your system 10-12 hours, nicotine up to 8 hours.
- Avoid alcohol, screen time, cannabis close to bedtime. These impact the natural sleep pattern (so you don't sleep soundly, or fall asleep but wake up more).
  - If you must watch, use a blue light filter (wear the glasses or change the screen)

### At Night - Maintain your sleep routine every day

- Regular times: Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day (7-9 hours in bed).
  - *Set, turn on the 'time for bed' reminders on your phone's Health app*
- Sleep-conducive environment in the room where you sleep: very dark (if needed, use an eyeshade or black-out curtains), cool, quiet. Sleep on a comfortable mattress, with or without pillows, and comfortable sheets and blankets.
- Designated place: use bedroom only for sleep and sex. Use electronics and work elsewhere so the body recognizes this room means 'time to sleep'.
- Maintain a regular, relaxing bedtime routine. Examples:
  - *Warm bath, shower, sauna*
  - *Dim the lights, do not use electronics for at least 1+ hour before bed*
  - *Deep breathing 3+ min during day + before bed – meditation on breathing*
  - *Snuggle someone, or use a weighted blanket...*
  - *Relaxing scents – tea, incense, candle, oil ...*
  - *Relaxing sounds – nature, slow instrumental (60 bpm)*
  - *Recite a mantra, pray, or count – meditation to stop rumination/worry*
  - *Make a deal with yourself to respond to an issue tomorrow (now is time for sleep)*
  - *Visualization – body scan, gentle waves... - meditation*
  - *Slow stretch, rock, roll for at least 15 min*



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## Details on calming activities that prepare you for sleep, or going back to sleep:

1. Breathe deeply – take full, long, deep breaths through your nose, relax the belly so the diaphragm can move freely (try to not breath as much in the upper chest). **Focus on having longer exhales** than inhales to *stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system (PNS – the rest – digest – snuggle – sleep response)*.
  - Inhale slowly for 1-6, 7, or 8... use full lung volume
  - Exhale even more slowly for 1-8, 10, 12...
  - *Do not hold breath*
  - *Do what works: continue counting or stop counting (use the rhythm)*
  - Repeat. ~6 breaths/min for 3+ min
2. Body scan – feel inside your body - top to bottom or bottom to top. Become aware of, or even squeeze/tense and release each body part (e.g. toes), then move to next body part (e.g. ankle).
3. Snuggle someone - a partner, a pet, a weighted blanket or body pillow... Touch engages the body's natural systems for safety, bonding, and regulation.
4. Smell something that relaxes you. Smell, emotion, and the nervous system are linked. For some people, specific essential oils lower cortisol (stress hormone), calm breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, and enhance deep sleep (N3): *Lavender, Chamomille, Lemon balm, Sandalwood, Bergamot, Yiang-yiang, Cedar, Sage... or the scent of a loved one.*
5. Listen to something that relaxes you. Predictable, nonthreatening sounds signal safety, can lower cortisol (stress) and increase oxytocin (bonding, calm). Choose music/sounds that are rhythmic, repetitive, continuous - these shift brain waves from Beta (alert) to Alpha (relaxed), Theta (drowsy), Delta (deep sleep).
  - **Nature:** ocean waves, rain, trees dancing with wind...
    - Nature-like, **broad spectrum noise:** White, Pink, Brown...
  - **Voice:** chanting (mantra), lullabies, humming (*stimulates PNS*)
  - **Heart beat:** slow tempo instrumental music, 60 beats/min (heart beat rate)
    - *Weightless (Academy of Sound Therapy)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfcAVEjslrU>
    - *Electra (Airstream)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gx38GBOZ6PU>
  - **Brain waves:** binaural beats. **Use headphones** and match frequency to sleep (Theta 4-8 Hz, Delta 0.5-4 Hz) vs other interests.
    - *Hypnotic Relaxation* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlrnObUjA1U>.
6. Counting practice – Imagine something boring and peaceful, and count them. Examples: imagine sheep walking in a line in a pasture; waves lapping on the edge of a beach; a big tree with leaves moving in a gentle wind. Feel each breath move in and out and count them (go up to 1, 3, 5, or whatever); feel your pulse...
7. Mantra practice – Say a short kind phrase in your mind, over and over. I



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- Find a rhythm when saying the mantra, perhaps match your breath or heartbeat. Focus on the mantra instead of the distracting ruminations or worries. Breathe.
  - You can tap your fingers, or use your fingers to cycle through beads (e.g. mala bracelet, rosary, mardi gras necklace...) while repeating the mantra. Turn one bead for each repetition of the mantra.
  - Choose a mantra from below or find another short one. Repeat for 5+ min. Using a mantra in another language is helpful so the mind does not attach to the words.
    - Peace, Love, Joy, Grace
    - May all beings have peace
    - Om Mani Padme Hum (*Compassion for all beings*)
    - Om Tari Tutari Turi Soha (*Wisdom and compassion*)
    - Nam Myoho Renge Kyo (*Transformation; vow to not yield to being consumed by difficulties, and to discover a way to joy, peace, freedom.*)
    - Gate, Gate, Para gate, Par sum gate, Bodhi soha (*Go beyond, go beyond, go further beyond, go even further beyond that. Open, Grow, 'don't know'.*)
8. If you are worrying about something, imagine 'the problem solved' or 'make a deal' with yourself. Say: *"I am allowed and justified to rest even when ABC isn't resolved. I will pick that up tomorrow at X time. Now is time to sleep"* 'Agreements' aid sleep:
- Acknowledges the inner communication, rather than suppressing or subverting it, which leads to vigilance, nagging (not helpful to sleep).
  - Gives the mind closure – *you are heard, you are safe* - so it can let go, shift to rest. If it helps, write 'it' down and let it go.
  - Builds inner trust that nothing important is forgotten or ignored.
  - Learn when different work is done: Night = restoration ; Day = problem identification & solving
9. If you are awake for more than 20 min, and feel frustrated, get up.
- Do something slow and boring, in dark/low light. Example: Go to the kitchen, sit in a chair and very slowly drink a glass of water for 5-10 min in the dark. Then go back to bed.
  - Or stretch...
10. Stretch, rock, or roll your body while sitting on the floor, bed or a chair.
- Keep the lights off or dim.
  - Hold each stretch for 5 or more deep long breaths (about a minute).
  - Breath in - spine extends long; breath out - settle the body into the ground. Breathe through the nose (not the mouth).



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### **In the dark (lights off)**

**Stable surface** (lay on floor or bed)

**Use support** (sofa, block, strap, ball)

**Deep breathing** (nose)

### **3 planes of motion - spine, hips, shoulders**

👉 Bend forward

👉 Bend backward

👉 Bend to each side

👉 Twist

👉 Legs together

👉 Legs open

👉 Legs split

👉 Legs cross

👉 Flex & point feet... toes flat, toes tucked

🦋 Arms behind

🦋 Arms up

🦋 Arms in front

🦋 Arms cross

🪨 **Rock or roll slowly**

Learn more from the National Sleep Foundation: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/>.

*If you suspect that you have a sleep pathology (e.g. sleep apnea), contact your General Practice physician to be referred to a specialized sleep program or physician for tests and medically-based solutions. Modern medicine provides numerous solutions that can be very effective when used in combination with the approaches above.*