

10 Tips For A Perfect Night of Sleep



This book is provided free of charge through the Freeman's Fitness website.

Disclaimer: I am not a doctor. All advice in this book is general and should not be taken as a substitute for professional medical advice. I do not claim to heal any type of injury, illness or disease.

Sleep is a complex issue, whilst many of these suggestions below will help you, there is a chance that none of it will! If none of it works and you still have sleep problems then consult a doctor.

If you continue to struggle with sleep it is recommended you see a doctor as there are some medical conditions that may need to be addressed such as sleep apnea.

Introduction

Sleep is one of the most overlooked parts of living a healthy and happy life. A lack of both quality and quantity of sleep will leave us feeling terrible long term.

This book aims to help you to improve your ability to sleep. Whilst some people will have real medical conditions preventing them sleeping, the majority of people with 'insomnia' have a lifestyle that causes it rather than a medical condition underlying their problem. Staying up late watching tv, drinking coffee late into the night or partying until 6am and then being unable to get proper sleep does not constitute insomnia.

As with getting healthy in other aspects such as losing weight, it takes effort and persistence to see change. Many people are lucky to be able to sleep easily at night regardless of the situation.

I am not one of them. I have always struggled to sleep but once applying these principles below I can sleep and feel refreshed every day.

This book will outline why sleep is so important to a healthy life and how you can improve upon your sleep. It is not intended as medical advice and those with legitimate medical concerns should see a doctor. Many problems such as sleep apnea are real issues that need addressing. Even for these people though, trying the solutions in this book will likely help.

Importance of Sleep

Sleep is one of the most important aspects of a healthy lifestyle, in fact it is the most important part in many aspects. Lack of sleep is itself a cause of many health problems but the biggest problem with a lack of sleep is how it impacts on your ability to perform the other two essential healthy habits of eating well and exercising.

Lack of sleep in the modern world is an extremely common phenomenon. Our modern lifestyle and ways of living have contributed to an epidemic of poor sleep.

Poor sleep has been linked as a factor in almost every chronic disease.

Getting stronger, fitter and healthier is infinitely harder if you are not sleeping well!

There is endless science proving this fact, but without going into depth of scientific studies I am sure you can feel how much harder it is just to exercise or eat well when you are tired!

What is 'proper' sleep

We all differ in the amount of sleep that we need. Some people can get by on 6 hours a night whilst others can't have any less than 9 hours. The average amount of sleep needed to function well is 6-9 hours for adults and teenagers may need up to 10 hours. The only way you can work this out is by trial and error. If you feel refreshed after only ever getting 6 hours sleep then you are not unhealthy because you are not getting the 8 hours most people recommend.

The best way to tell if you are getting a good night's rest is how you feel when you wake up as well as throughout the day. If you wake up feeling horrible and very tired or are feeling very tired regularly throughout the day there is a good chance you need more sleep, better quality sleep or both!

There are various kinds of sleep problems. Mostly people who find it hard to sleep cannot lie in bed and sleep straight away. Other people find that they can sleep but then wake up through the night and are unable to get back to sleep. Some can sleep but still wake up too often or just feel groggy upon waking. **If you have any long term sleep problem then you should always consult a medical profession.**

Sleep deprivation causes many kinds of problems physically and mentally. Not the least of which is the simple horrible general feeling that comes with waking up having not had enough sleep. Everybody can relate to this and feeling this on a morning before work is a terrible way to start the day. Often this feeling will continue throughout the day and impact upon everything you do.

A band aid solution is to drink coffee which helps until the inevitable crash, whereby even more coffee is had to stave off the effects of sleep deprivation. This contributes to the cycle of caffeine interfering with sleep that is one of the biggest reasons for being unable to sleep at night.

Why is it so hard to sleep?

As you will see later, one of the solutions that can be used to help sleep is to go camping! This really sums up why we have such problems sleeping. In a 'natural' or 'wild' state humans regulate their sleep much better. If you live exposed to the outdoors and a traditional lifestyle, the problems of sleep deprivation are almost non-existent.

Much like our modern processed diets causing health problems, our modern lifestyle is the underlying cause of most sleep problems. Throughout the book you will see that many of the problems caused from our modern lifestyle. Often these are unavoidable, we need to work to get money or stay up late because of work functions.

For some people they can still sleep even with this lifestyle, but for the majority of people sleeping in the modern world is a struggle.

How Can I Improve My Sleep?

Sleep is very multifaceted. There are a big combination of factors that can affect your ability to sleep. The following will outline some major problems associated with sleep and how you can address each of these issues. For most people their sleep problems are caused by their lifestyle and they can be fixed by making appropriate changes. Whilst these won't work for everyone, they are likely to work for most people.

Improving your sleep with not happen overnight (pun intended).

Just like getting stronger or losing weight it will take some dedicated effort!

If you have struggled with sleep for a long time then it is likely you have many of these issues that need addressing. They cannot be all solved at once but if you work at each one you will see and feel your sleep get better and better over time.

1. Sleep schedule

A person's sleep schedule is the waking and sleeping time that they have on a continual basis. Some people say they are morning people, rising early and sleeping early whereas others are the opposite. There is evidence to suggest that there may be a physiological basis to this in some people. The problem occurs when your lifestyle impacts upon this schedule.

For example, you have to wake up at 6am Monday to Friday for work and over the weekend you sleep in until midday. During the week by 10pm your body has been awake 16 hours and will often be tired even if your sleep is not great. Friday night comes along and you stay up until 3am or so and sleep until midday.

On Saturday night, you won't have been awake for 16 hours until 4am Sunday morning. Trying to sleep at an earlier hour than will become very difficult. This cycle of sleep is very common and in some people, it is very difficult to stop.

How can you fix your sleep schedule?

A hard remedy to this is to try as much as possible to continue waking up early even after later nights. Often this means you will be tired but it will help keep your schedule more regular. A better but far less popular option is to not stay up so late on weekends.

This is the ideal situation but I understand that not everybody wishes to do this, but be aware that if your sleep deprivation is causing big problems then it is probably worth having a regular schedule for at least a few weeks or even months to get it back to a healthier state.

Ideally you want to wake up at the same time each day. Going to bed at the same time is beneficial but not as important as the regular waking up time. This means on weekends if you went to sleep at midnight instead of 10, try to get up within an hour of your weekday wake up time. Sleeping in even for one day can take a lot of hard work away.

Another potential remedy is to go camping. A few days spent in the outdoors has the effect of resetting our sleep cycles to a more natural rhythm. Not only will this reset your sleep cycle, it will help in reducing your stress levels greatly which will further benefit your ability to get a good night's rest. Once returning from a few nights camping try to stick to the schedule!

2. 90 minute cycles

The human body sleeps in cycles. The cycles contain several stages of deeper and lighter sleep and a full 'cycle' runs almost exactly 90 minutes in most people. The middle of these cycles is a much deeper sleep and it is hard to wake somebody in this state. The beginning and end of the cycle is much lighter and it is much easier to wake up during this stage.

At the end of each cycle most people are almost in a wakened state. Throughout the night it is common to be fully awake for a few short minutes at the borders of each sleep cycle. Generally you will immediately begin the next cycle and when the morning comes you will have forgotten about it.

If you need to use the bathroom during the night it is unlikely that you will wake during the deep sleep but once the cycle ends you will often wake up because your body is almost in a wakened state.

When we are woken up by an alarm clock it is often during a 90 minute sleep cycle. Waking up during a sleep cycle always feels worse than waking up at the end of a sleep cycle. If you wake up naturally less than 90 minutes before you need to then it is generally better to just stay awake. If you go back to sleep and your alarm goes off in 40 minutes you will be into your deep sleep cycle and feel even worse.

For example, if you need to wake up at 7am for work and your alarm is set. If you open your eyes and look at a clock and see it is 6:20am you are much better off staying awake. Falling back to sleep will only mean you feel even worse when you are jolted awake by an alarm clock 40 minutes later.

A new type of alarm clock has been brought out in recent years that wakes you up by a bright lamp that gradually gets brighter over about half an hour. This simulates the sun rise and can make you feel like you have woken up more gradually as opposed to the shock of an alarm clock.

3. The mind that won't shut off

A big problem many of us have when trying to sleep is thinking about things. This could be work, relationships, things you need to get done. The list is endless and often thinking of these types of things becomes more frequent just as we are trying to sleep.

The reason behind this is still unknown but it is especially common in people who have a lot of things on their plate. Generally your workday will never be finished the way you want it so there are always loose ends.

A diary is the best solution to this problem. This is a basic diary that sits next to your bed and is used for writing out all the thoughts you are having before you sleep. I find that many times when I go to bed I get some great creative thoughts or just thinking in general. If we sit with these thoughts we can be prevented from sleeping by going over and over them in our minds.

With a diary we can get those thoughts out of the head and onto some paper. Once they are written down we are far less likely to keep thinking about them. Write down everything you keep thinking about no matter how silly or useful it may seem.

Another approach to this is meditation. If you already meditate then you are well on the way to helping control these annoying interrupting thoughts preventing your sleep. If meditation is something new to you it may take time to develop the habit of it.

At its most basic meditation is sitting with your thoughts and not following them too far. Meditating for 5-10minutes in a dark room before bed can be a big help towards falling asleep comfortably.

If you wake up again during the night, the best thing you can do is try to soothe and calm yourself rather than turn on lights and get aggravated even further. This will simply make your body go into a fight or flight state and make it much harder to every fall back to sleep!

4. Turn off the Lights

One of the biggest concerns for our modern lifestyle is artificial lighting at night. It is only in relatively recent history that humans have had the ability to light things up so brightly in the evenings. 200 years ago the only light available was candle light, its brightness very low and more difficult to maintain. The advent of the lightbulb meant that humans could put bright lights on everywhere and were no longer slaves to the cycle of night and day. This was great for productivity but terrible for human health.

The human body has evolved for hundreds of thousands – millions of years in an environment where the sun rose and fell each day. At night humans were not looking at lights any brighter than the moonlight. Our bodies therefore have adapted to this light and dark cycle. We were awake when it was light and asleep when it was dark. As with many other bodily functions, our sleep is influenced heavily by hormonal changes. The body releases hormones in response to light and dark.

What is the implication of all this? In basic terms it means that artificial light at night is a big problem for getting to sleep. Many people watch tv, use computers or phones late into the night as well as having lights on all around the house. Working night shifts will also have this effect as you are returning home to sleep as the sun rises! All of this light signals your body that it is still day and not to sleep. We can still eventually sleep but often this will cause a delay in sleep and for some it can be a real problem.

There are many ways to reduce the impact of artificial light. A total lack of light at least an hour before you plan to sleep is the most ideal situation. If this cannot be done then try to leave house lighting off or invest in dimmers to reduce the intensity of your lights especially at night. For electronic devices, dimming the brightness can help reduce this problem.

For phones and computers, a program (TOTALLY FREE) called F lux can be installed. <https://justgetflux.com/>. This program will make your screen look more orange at night. This reduces the intensity of the blue light given off by the screen which is the part of the light spectrum most responsible for preventing the release of melatonin.

It can look strange at first but after a few minutes you shouldn't notice a problem. If you are trying to watch videos or view photos etc it has an option to turn it off as the colours will be incorrect. For other tasks like reading or writing it is worth having it on.

The room you sleep in is the most important place to ensure no light is present. A completely darkened room will assist greatly in sleeping. Many apartments and homes have outdoor lighting that seeps in at night. Curtains are generally not sufficient to completely block out light coming in. Shuttered blinds are the best at reducing the light completely from getting in. Electronic devices in the room often have small lights at night, alarm clocks, standby lights etc. They may seem dull when you are trying to sleep but once your eyes have adapted to darkness you can see just how bright they are in a room. Thick tape over these devices or simply switching them off at the powerpoint will stop this light.

The importance of a dark room for sleeping cannot be overstated. You may still get to sleep in a room filled with light but for those who struggle to sleep it can be a big problem. Even once you get to sleep, if you wake up at night and the room is bright it can prevent you falling back to sleep. If you do wake up and need to use the bathroom or anything else it is important to do so without lights on. This can be tricky but if you walk slowly around your house you should be fine. Turning lights on in the middle of the night is very jolting and can wake you up enough that you will struggle again to fall asleep.

As an addendum to the above, not enough bright light during the day can set us up for failure as well. Often we spend almost the entire day at home or in the office. This means we only see artificial lights and not as much from the sun. The very bright sunlight triggers hormonal release in the body and makes us feel more wakeful. Not getting enough of this light during the day can cause our hormonal levels to malfunction and in turn make sleeping harder.

5. The Bedroom Environment

The bedroom as the name suggests is a room for a bed. Today it seems that the bedroom is often another living room or for younger people a study, living room and sleeping area. Sometimes this cannot be avoided entirely but in many cases it can. The bed should only be used for sleep and other human activities that require it, even that should be moved out where possible.

Treating the bedroom as a sleep only area can help in mentally switching off. As noted earlier, there are often mental blocks for people trying to sleep. If you are watching tv in your bed (the light problem occurs here too) then try to sleep, you may find it difficult. If instead you watch it in a separate room (I would recommend not watching it at all at night) then you can switch it off and head into the bed room with the intent of sleeping.

Separating the bedroom and other rooms is simple for many people who have the space available. If you have a laptop you can use this anywhere in the house and I would recommend never doing anything in your bedroom that you do not have to.

If you cannot separate your study, living and sleeping areas then it is worth doing so at least for part of the day. If for example you always study in your room, consider going to a different room in the house for at least a few hours before you sleep.

6. Caffeine and Alcohol

Caffeine is the most widely used drug on earth. There are very few cultures where it is a taboo to drink coffee or tea so it is an almost universal habit. Many of us consume 4 or more cups of coffee a day or drink energy drinks instead.

The highest caffeine containing drink is coffee with an average cup having 100-150mg. A 250ml can of energy drink usually only has 80mg in comparison but always check the label. Black tea can have as much as 60mg in a cup and green or white tea will have 30-50mg. With tea, the caffeine level is dependent on how much you steep it with longer steeping releasing more caffeine.

The best way to negate problems from caffeine is to stop having it altogether. This is also the most difficult to do as coffee drinking is so widespread. The second best way is to reduce your overall consumption and not have caffeine later in the day.

You can also try to replace some drinks like coffee with a green yea so that you are reducing the overall amount of caffeine you are consuming. Decaffeinated coffee is another option, especially in the afternoon and evening.

Caffeine is removed from the body slowly with a half life of up to 6 hours in many people. This means that the 200mg of caffeine you had at 4pm, 100mg will still be active in your system by 10pm! By having caffeine throughout the afternoon and evening there are still large amounts of it lurking around causing you even more problems to sleep!

Extra tip: Alcohol and caffeine are often consumed together. Red bull and coke and two big mixers used with alcohol. As explained later, alcohol is a problem for sleep on its own. When mixed with large amounts of caffeine it can make your sleep and hungover even worse than alcohol on its own.

The second most commonly used drug after caffeine is alcohol. Alcohol often makes us feel sleepy when we drink it. After several hours though we can feel even more wakeful and it can make sleeping after a big night very difficult. Even if we can sleep after a lot of alcohol it is likely to be very poor sleep.

7. Diet

Your eating habits can impact upon how you sleep. If you are interested in improving your health then you will already know the importance of a healthy diet. A well-nourished body will have more energy and less need for artificial energy sources such as caffeine. It will also have higher levels of vitamins and minerals that are important to sleep quality.

Just as important for sleeping can be when and how you eat. Eating meals late at night can in some people cause them to be unable to sleep for many hours after the meal, especially if it is a large meal.

I would recommend not eating large meals at least 2 hours before you are intending to sleep. Extra care should be given for evening meals to chew food more thoroughly to aid faster digestion. Eating more carbohydrates with an evening meal can also help you to sleep due to hormonal responses (ever felt tired after eating a lot of carbs?).

8. Exercise

Exercise is a great way to tire out your body to enable you to sleep. Mental exhaustion from work or similar doesn't generally have the same ability to help us sleep and can often prove to be the opposite. Regular physical activity though can help tire the body so that it can relax at night and get to sleep. Many people are so full of excess energy that it is no wonder they cannot sleep. As above with diet, regular exercise has more benefits than just sleeping ability but it can do wonders for helping people get to sleep at night. Exercise can also be a problem for sleep if you do it too close to your intended sleeping time. I would recommend doing intense exercise at least 3 hours before bed time. Going for a walk at night at a slow pace should not be a problem, but a big run or weights session could leave you energized and struggling to sleep for a few hours.

9. Sleeping Pills/Drugs

There are many drugs that are available to aid in getting to sleep. The use of these should only be considered once all of the above sleeping habits have been thoroughly implemented and tested. Most people should find that implementing the above solutions will help them enough that their sleep is normal again. **The use of drugs should always be a final option and if it is used it should be done sporadically.**

I would recommend that people do not use any type of sleeping pills unless specifically prescribed by a doctor. If you are prescribed by a doctor always be sure to ask them if it is truly necessary and try everything before going down that road. Sleeping pills often just mask problems mentioned above, do not provide a deep and refreshing sleep and you can become dependent on them to sleep very quickly.

10. Supplements

Melatonin

This one is not considered a sleeping pill as such but it is a hormonal compound that can be taken to aid sleep. Melatonin is naturally secreted in the brain at various cycles throughout the day. At night it is released in response to a lack of light. The release of melatonin by the body makes us feel sleepy and helps us in getting to sleep.

Melatonin used to be available without a prescription but now most places have made a prescription necessary. Whilst melatonin can be useful, it is a natural hormone and the long term effects of usage are not known. To be on the safe side I would recommend only trying this after exhausting other options and even then only using very sporadically such as when jet lagged or needing to reset your sleep cycle.

Supplements

The final part of the pyramid is the use of supplements to help in sleep. I use the term supplements to describe things available over the counter to aid in sleep, this does not include any type of drug. The main available supplements for sleep are magnesium, valerian and chamomile.

Magnesium

Magnesium is an essential mineral that is one of the most commonly deficient minerals in the human diet. Even those who eat well often do not get an optimal amount of magnesium. This is due in part to the depleted soils that much of our food is grown in. Magnesium supplementation is not toxic in normal doses and can be very effective.

Magnesium is responsible for many functions of the human body. It is also a very relaxing compound especially when taken in supplement form. Magnesium will help you to get to sleep and help you have a better quality sleep as well. A healthy diet full of vegetables will provide you with magnesium but often not enough!

There are many forms of magnesium available. Supplemental magnesium should be used in the form of magnesium citrate or glycinate. Other forms of magnesium are not really absorbed and should be avoided. Take 2-3 of the supplemental tablets two hours before bed and it should help you to fall asleep. You can also try taking a bath with Epsom salts mixed in.

Valerian

Valerian root is a herb often used to feel relaxation and aid sleep. There are many mixed studies on valerian and its usefulness as a sleep aid is still not fully understood. Nevertheless it is a very nontoxic compound so it can be worth trying out. It is available in its plant form to be made into a tea, or more commonly found in supplemental extract form.

Extra point on Napping

Everybody loves a good nap. I try to get a 20-30min nap at some point throughout most days. Any nap you take should be quite short, 20-40minutes. If you nap longer than that you will likely wake up feeling groggy and find more difficulty sleeping at night.

Try to nap earlier in the day rather than past 4pm or so. Napping too much through the day can make it difficult to get to sleep at night. When you are trying to fix up your sleeping habits, the best option is to avoid napping altogether so that you can more successfully sleep at night.

Coffee nap

One of the best ways to nap is a coffee nap. This is just as it sounds, having a coffee and then having a nap right after. As caffeine takes about 30 minutes to enter the bloodstream, a quick coffee followed by a 20 minute nap will leave you waking up feeling refreshed and ready to go. Only try this before about 2pm as we have before that caffeine too late in the day will cause us to be wakeful.

I hope this book has been valuable for you!

Sleep is a hard nut to crack but once you implement these strategies I know you will start to feel so much better!

If you have any comments, queries or need a hand send Daniel an email to daniel@freemansfitness.com.au

Visit Freeman's Fitness on facebook

www.facebook.com/freemansfit