

The importance of sleep!!

“Good morning, good afternoon and if I don’t see you, good evening!” ... a line from the movie “Truman Show”. It’s a movie about a man who was filmed for twenty-four hours a day in a “constructed reality”; everyone was happy, everything was perfect. In our lives, wouldn’t it be great to wake up every day, rested, happy, with no stress and be surrounded by people who were the same?

I want to discuss and review recent findings and studies that show how important sleep is and how it affects us. I have recently been doing a lot of research on recovery and the importance, in terms of performance, and came across some exciting new discoveries on just how important sleep is to us. One of the biggest eye openers for me was when I had a chance to watch a seminar by Dr. Kirk Parsley, a retired USN SEAL, NSWG-1 doctor to the west coast SEAL teams. This guy has gone through it all and knows what it’s like to operate at the top of his game, so when he talks about recovery, I listen!! He started out the seminar by talking about three pillars of health: Nutrition / Exercise / Sleep. Guess what he considers the most important? You guessed it, the topic I will discuss today - SLEEP!

So what is sleep? It’s funny, you ask people this question and they struggle with an answer. Here is something we do every day yet we don’t know or can’t define what sleep actually is. The definition Dr. Parsley used is: a barrier that exists between you and your environment, and you can be awakened. When you’re awake you are present and aware of your surroundings. The barrier that he talks about is the lack of that awareness. You can be awakened; if you hit your head and are knocked out you can’t be awakened, so when you’re sleeping, the difference between that and being unconscious is that fact that you can wake up.

Let’s look at sleep over the ages and compare that to how we sleep today. Long ago our ancestors would go to bed when the sun went down and get up when the sun came back up. The number of hours of sleep our ancient ancestors got would depend on the time of year and their location in the world. In Victorian time (pre-light bulb), there are records and journals that show people were averaging ten hours of sleep per night. Fast forward to the 1960s, people were getting an average of eight hours of sleep per night. Recent studies show that the average North American gets only six hours of sleep per night. Today, we push the limits, we wear it like a badge, we are hardcore; we don’t need sleep!! Ain’t got no time for that!!!

Why is sleep so important? The effects of sleep deprivation are:

- Irritability
- ADD and ADHD-like symptoms
- Cognitive impairment
- Memory lapses and loss
- Impaired immune system
- Risk of heart disease
- Decrease in reaction time
- A loss of two hours of sleep increases daytime hunger by 25%
- A loss of one hour of sleep per night for a year (with all other factors such as diet, exercise staying the same) = 14.3 lbs of added fat
- Willpower is directly related to the pre-frontal cortex. Pre-frontal cortex activity is impaired with stress, overtraining, drugs and lack of sleep.
- The CDC (Centre for Disease Control) has said that long-term lack of sleep increases your chances of CVD and Cancer by as much as 43%. That’s the same percentage as smoking!!

What is sleep deprivation? “I feel okay,” people say, “I get enough sleep!!” “The recommended amount of sleep will vary for each person depending on their daily activity and other factors, but a general chart below will give you a rough idea:

How Much Sleep Do You Really Need?

Age	Sleep Needs
Newborns (0-2 months)	12-18 hours
Infants (3 to 11 months)	14 to 15 hours
Toddlers (1-3 years)	12 to 14 hours
Preschoolers (3-5 years)	11 to 13 hours
School-age children (5-10 years)	10 to 11 hours
Teens (10-17)	8.5-9.25 hours
Adults	7-9 hours

Source: National Sleep Foundation

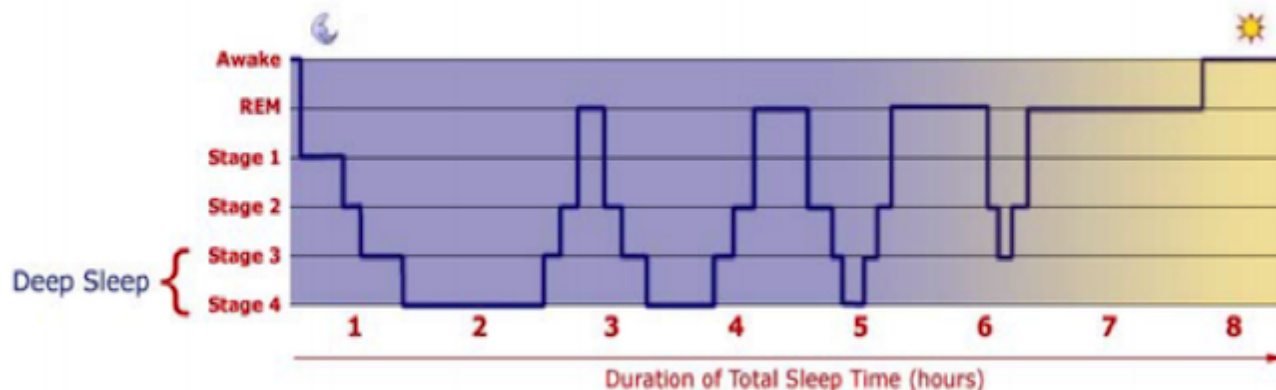
Sleep deprivation is when you aren't getting the recommended amount of sleep over a period of time. An interesting study showed that after 3-4 days of sleep deprivation we lose the ability to identify the fact that we are actually sleep deprived. So when people say, "I get enough sleep, I don't notice a difference," this is the reason.

Before discussing how we can turn this around, let's look at how we are designed to sleep:

1. Blue light decreases
2. Stimulates pineal gland
3. Releases melatonin
4. Melatonin decreases adrenal function
5. Body temperature decreases
6. Heart rate decreases
7. Blood pressure decreases
8. Brain slows down
9. Blood sugar drops
10. Immune system INCREASES
11. Hormones replenish

A proper sleep:

Sleep Cycles Throughout Sleep



How do we turn this around? Here is a list of the top ways to do so:

1. Blacken your room
 - a. When I say blacken your room, go out and get blackout blinds and eliminate ways in which light can get in (i.e. close doors).
2. Quit using electronics in bed
 - a. A bed is for two things: sleeping and sex. Don't sit on your computer, iPad or phone while you're

in bed.

3. Make a firm bedtime – STICK TO IT!!
 - a. You have to make a schedule and stick with it. I know this isn't possible all the time. Things come up and we can overcome the occasional late night.
4. Get up at the same time every day (even weekends)
 - a. With the schedule, you need to stick to getting up at the same time every day. If you were up late the night before, I will discuss later how to make up for it.
5. Learn five ways to decrease stress
 - a. You need to learn five ways to decrease stress. One of my favourites is yoga. Some people like reading and others like going for walks. Find five you can incorporate into your daily routine and make sure to stick to at least one on a daily basis.
6. Improve insulin sensitivity via diet
 - a. Make sure that you're eating a well-balanced diet, and avoid simple sugars and highly processed foods.
7. Exercise daily
 - a. Get outside for a walk, join a running club, or play a racquet sport. Whatever it is, get up and get moving, make sure to add this into your daily routine, and schedule this time like you would a doctor's appointment.
8. Decrease blue light three hours before bed
 - a. There are various sources that emit this blue-violet-light; the sun, LED lighting, CFLs, tablets, TVs, computer screens and smart phones.
9. Data dump
 - a. Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On one side, make a to-do list, and on the other side make a to-worry list. You then have to understand that you are going to be more capable of dealing with the to-do list after you get a good night's sleep.
10. If you snore loudly, see a doctor.

I mentioned a schedule and sticking to it. Like I said, there are times when we are out late due to a sporting event, travel, social function and various other reasons. What do we do in these circumstances? We plan for sleep deprivation. Let's say we need eight hours of sleep but the night before we were only able to get six hours, leaving a sleep debt of two hours. We are going to nap then...yes, nap. Napping is good for us. Naps are 20-120 minutes in length, anything longer is, well, just sleep. Napping won't impair our nocturnal sleep. Make sure, though, that you're not napping three hours before bed. A ninety minute nap is optimal as this is one complete sleep cycle. In the example I mentioned above, we were in a sleep deprivation of two hours, so during the day you could have a ninety minute nap then later a thirty minute nap.

One other point I discovered in my research, and in fact have had clients tell me, is I wake up during the night or can't get to sleep because my brain is thinking about what I have to do tomorrow, or stressing about an upcoming test. I mentioned above Data Dumping. This is a great way to help us overcome the 'stress brain' syndrome. This allows us to get rid of it, so-to-speak. Write it out so there is a list of things to do and from that list build a plan to accomplish these tasks. The biggest thing with a data dump is to understand that after writing down the two lists, you will be far more capable of accomplishing and overcoming things on the list with a good night's sleep. Let it go, get some rest and get up the next day ready to go!

The more and more I research and talk with various doctors and scientists about sleep, the more I become aware of just how important sleep is!! I started this research on recovery with my athletes' performance in mind and have come to realize that lack of sleep affects us all. By adopting some of the good sleep habits I listed above, we can dramatically improve our overall health. In fact, over the last three weeks, I have incorporated these into my life and I have noticed a decrease in my resting heart rate in the morning, have much more energy during the day, as well as a cognitive improvement (articles and programming taking less time to accomplish). Till next time, adopt some of the good sleep habits and see what a difference it can make in your quest to be a better you.

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