10 Tips for a Better Night's Sleep

In our previous post, *Detox in Your Sleep with Proper Sleep Hygiene*, we stress the importance of getting a good night's sleep – not only so you feel rested the next day, but also to enable your brain to detoxify itself. The slow and steady brain and cardiopulmonary activity associated with deep, non-REM sleep are optimal for the function of the *glymphatic system* – the brain's unique pathway for removing toxic waste. This nightly flushing of waste and toxic proteins from the brain is very likely to help protect against aging and irreversible and progressive brain disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.

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In that previous post, we highlight some of the underlying health issues that negatively impact sleep, such as pain, bladder conditions, poor blood sugar balance, and gastrointestinal issues. While we can certainly help you address these and other health conditions that may impair your ability to sleep deeply, you can take several steps on your own to improve your sleep quantity and quality on a nightly basis.

In this post, we present 10 tips for getting a better night’s sleep:

1. Set the Stage

Are your bed and bedroom conducive to deep sleep? Here’s a checklist to ensure that the stage is set for a good night’s sleep:

- **Comfortable:** Your mattress, pillows, sheets, and blankets all contribute to comfort, and different people have different preferences. Just make sure you feel comfy in your bed.
- **Dark:** Turn off all the lights at night and look around the room to identify any sources of ambient light, such as moonlight or street lights shining through the windows, night lights, and light from any electronic devices. Identify and address any and all sources of light. Another option is to wear an eye mask, as long as you feel comfortable doing so.
- **Quiet:** Block out all noise, if possible, or, if you prefer, find a source of “white noise” that helps you sleep. For example, some people like to run a fan at night.
- **Cool:** 60 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit is considered the ideal range.
- **Tidy:** A messy bedroom is likely to make you feel a little on edge. Aim for clean and uncluttered.

2. Establish a Healthy Sleep Routine

Every day has a natural rhythm to it, which is aligned with the rising and setting of the sun. Every living organism, plants and animals included, has an internal clock – a circadian rhythm tuned to the daily rhythm of sunrise and sunset. To get sufficient, quality sleep, you need to honor your circadian rhythm.

In the days before electricity, this was fairly easy – you woke to the rising sun (or the birds singing) and went to bed when it got dark outside. Now, you might work nights and have to sleep during the day, or you may need to stay up to fit everything into your busy schedule.

What’s important is that you have a healthy sleep routine – you wake up at about the same time every morning and go to bed at about the same time every night. This routine helps to reset or retrain your internal clock. Your sleep routine also includes what you do before bed, such as the following:

- **Winding down at least an hour before bedtime:** For example, TV off, reading a book, stopping work or thinking about work, disengaging from any emotional situation.
- **Getting ready for bed:** For example, brushing your teeth, changing into any nightclothes you wear, and even the act of getting into bed.

Note: Ideally, you want to align your sleep routine with the rising and setting of the sun. To reinforce this alignment, try to get a healthy dose of sunlight every morning and during the day, and make sure your bedroom is pitch black at night.

3. Avoid Blue Light at Least an Hour and a Half before Bedtime

Blue light, whether from the sun, a TV screen, a computer, a smart phone, or an LED on some other electronic device (such as an electric alarm clock), is very effective at inhibiting the production of *melatonin* – the hormone that tells your body it’s bedtime. To ensure sufficient production and release of melatonin, avoid blue light at least one and a half hours before bedtime:

- No TV
- No laptop
- No cell phone or mobile devices

- Dim all lights as much as possible
- No light in the bedroom

Tip: You can buy special glasses to prevent most blue light from reaching your eyes.

4. Exercise During the Day, Not at Night

Daily exercise does wonders to improve sleep, but only if you exercise during the day. Avoid exercising at least a couple hours before bedtime. Exercise revs up your body, so if you do it close to bedtime, you're sending your body the wrong signal; you're telling your body that it's time to get up and move, when you should be telling it, "Go to sleep."

We recommend at least 10 minutes of aerobic exercise daily, such as walking or cycling.

5. Avoid Stimulants and Alcohol

If you're having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, the problem could be related to consumption of alcohol or stimulants (such as caffeine, nicotine, or even sugar). While alcohol may help you fall asleep, it tends to interrupt the natural sleep cycle, which may result in restless or interrupted sleep. It may also force you to wake in the middle of the night to use the bathroom.

If you're having sleep issues, try to eliminate or at least reduce your consumption of stimulants and alcohol especially near bedtime. If you're having to wake up during the night to use the restroom, consider not drinking any fluids one to two hours before bedtime.

6. Use Your Bed Only for Sleep and Sex

Many people have a TV in their bedroom, or they take their laptop or smartphone to bed to get a little work done before dozing off. This practice is counterproductive for two reasons:

- It exposes you to blue light before bedtime.
- It tells your body that your bedroom is a place to work or watch TV, when you should be telling your body that your bedroom is the place where sleep happens.

Of course, a bedroom is also a place for intimacy, which is also conducive to sleep.

7. Be Careful About Naps

Daytime naps can be very refreshing, especially if you engage in mentally exhausting work. Simply getting horizontal for 20 minutes can perk you up and give you a second wind to make it through the rest of the day.

However, napping too much during the day or napping at night can make it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep at bedtime. Here are a couple napping guidelines:

- Limit your daytime naps to 30 minutes. (Experiment with the duration of the nap. Everyone’s different. You may feel best with a 20-minute nap, while someone else feels best with an hour nap.)
- Don’t nap in the evening.

8. Eat Lightly, If at All, Before Bed

If you get hungry before bed, you may be fine eating a snack, but avoid eating a heavy meal, especially if you commonly suffer from indigestion at night. Having to digest a heavy meal can make it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. In addition, consuming high-calorie meals before bed on a regular basis can pack on the pounds. That’s because studies show eating after consuming a dinnertime meal has very little to do with hunger.

Instead, such food tends to be consumed while watching television, which is conducive to overeating.

9. Take a Relaxing Bath or Shower

A hot bath or shower 90 minutes or so before bed *may* help you fall asleep and sleep more deeply. Just soaking your feet in hot water can also help. Certain essential oils can be added to the water (or bath) to promote sleep, including the following:

- Lavender
- Vanilla
- Rose or geranium
- Jasmine
- Sandalwood

10. Don’t Force It

If you have trouble falling asleep or you wake up during the night, don’t just lie in bed trying to fall asleep unless, of course, that works for you. Instead, get up and move to a place where you can relax and read or engage in some other relaxing activity until you get drowsy again. You can then return to bed.

In addition to these 10 self-help tips, remember to address any underlying health issues that may interfere with a good night’s sleep. This is where we come in at our Tampa Functional Medicine practice. Here at BioDesign Wellness, we can perform a full workup to identify any underlying health issues and provide treatment and guidance to successfully address these issues. Call our customer experience manager, Lori at (813) 445-7770 to get started.

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