

7 Rules for Reducing Stress and Improving Sleep

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There's a strong correlation between how much sleep you get and how stressed you are. It's a vicious cycle that can cause mental distress and even wreak havoc on your physical well-being.

It's a well-known fact that people who don't get enough sleep are lethargic and constantly experiencing an energy slump. This causes irritability, which also makes it hard to fall asleep.

The reverse is also true. When you experience an exorbitant amount of stress during the day, it causes you to lie there awake – and that piles on more stress for the upcoming day.

The Huffington Post conducted a poll recently where they asked people what their #1 stressor was. Lack of sleep was one thing that dominated the results. Stress and a lack of sleep combined can cause you to lose mental clarity and they can put more pressure on your body to perform at less than optimal standards.

So, it's vital that you learn how to implement stress relief measures that *also* work to lull you to sleep at night. When you wake up fully refreshed, you'll be able to tackle the world and anything it throws at you!

Rule #1 - Implement a Bedtime Technology Ban

If you want to toss and turn and have trouble getting (or staying) awake, just keep your cell phone right by your bed. For some of you, that won't be a problem – but for many people, it's become an addiction that disrupts their sleep routine and causes a lack of sleep.

Some people have their computer right beside the bed and the glow of it lights up the room at night. Ditto for notifications that come in on cell

phones – sometimes with lights and sometimes with the inclusion of sounds.

Not only is it a physical factor, but it causes a certain amount of mental unrest when you're constantly checking emails or looking to see who posted what on Facebook.

The physical distraction of the computer glow tricks your body into thinking it's time for you to be awake. Your body won't produce the melatonin it needs and help you get (and stay) asleep, so you toss and turn all night.

Technology doesn't just have to be left out of the bedroom – it needs to be shut down quite awhile before you go to bed. Your mind needs time to disconnect and wind down itself, and it can't do that if you're constantly feeding it information.

If you go to bed at 10 PM, try disconnecting around 8:30 PM. Let your stress melt away and your mind relax. This isn't an easy habit to break, but you'll be able to implement it – even if you do it in baby steps, such as not taking it in the room with you, but using it right up until bedtime, and gradually creating a routine that's beneficial for your health.

Rule #2 – Adopt an Aromatherapy Habit

Aromatherapy soothes your mind and body for both sleep and de-stressing. Scents are a powerful element of our lives, and you can use the power of it to help you feel more rested.

Start off by choosing the right scents for you to unwind, let go of the anxiety the day brought, and get a good night's sleep. You don't want anything invigorating for bedtime – like peppermint.

That's a scent that's perfect to help you *start* your day – not end it. You want to look for scents that soothe and relax. Here are some possibilities:

- Bergamot

- Chamomile
- Jasmine
- Lavender
- Rose
- Vanilla

What's the best way to use these to unwind and get better sleep? You have many options when it comes to aromatherapy. You can find scented bath products (if you enjoy a bath before bed).

You can use candles, diffusers, wall plugins and more. Some people like to create or buy a special mist that they can spray on their pillows at night (or put on their wrists) before bed.

Rule #3 – Wind Down Your Day With Exercise

It sounds almost backwards – putting forth extra exertion when you really need to be relaxing and calming down. But that's just what exercise does for you! Exercise is a great stress reliever because it helps you release endorphins.

That's why you sometimes hear of athlete's bragging about their "runner's high" – because although they may start out fatigued, they hit a point in their regimen where the endorphins are released and they feel good.

Feeling good is one of the first steps to you being able to sleep well tonight! Your body has probably been tensed and knotted up all day while you were at work. Allowing it to exercise gives you some relief – somewhere to pour all of that tension into.

Exercise also helps you sleep better at night. We joke as parents about letting our kids wear themselves out so they're ready for a good, long nap – but the same goes for us as adults!

When the Huffington post conducted a poll for people who exercise in terms of how they sleep, they discovered that people who exercise don't just get *more* sleep – they get *better* sleep.

As you might suspect, the harder you work out, the harder you snooze each night! If you're not used to exercising, start out slow and work your way up. You can start off with a simple 10-minute-a-day plan and increase it a bit each week.

The side effect of exercising to get better sleep and stress less is that you might shed pounds if you're overweight! Poor sleep makes people gain weight according to recent studies – and stress is a definite factor in consuming too many calories.

Try to exercise after work – plenty of time before bed, but in the evening. If you exercise too close to bedtime and you discover that you still feel restless, just move your exercise up to an early time.

Rule #4 – Let Bath Meditation Boost Your Sleep Count

For some people, bath time is their *only* time of the day when they unwind and kick stress to the curb. There are no clocks ticking, no technology vying for your attention, and nobody talking to you.

It's just you, your warm, soothing water, and whatever environment you've created to help you relax. The environment for your bath meditation is just as important as the sleeping environment you create.

If it's off, then you can't relax. A cold, sterile bathroom won't lend itself to a calming environment. You can use bath meditation whether you have a 10-minute bath or an hour-long bath.

Some people like to incorporate aromatherapy during their bath meditation – and you can find candles or bubble bath that soothes you with lavender or chamomile or any other scent that calms, rather than invigorates you.

Music is another option for you to consider. You can choose soft, relaxing music – or even invest in some sort of guided imagery CDs that will walk you through a visualization process that helps you meditate while in the bath.

Just as you've made the commitment to turn off technology at bedtime, do the same for your bath time, too. You can't really relax and meditate if your smart phone is ringing off the hook.

Make sure that when you ease yourself into your bath, you start to get familiar with how you're breathing. Most people go through each day using shallow breathing, and it's deep breathing that cleanses the stress from your body and helps you sleep better.

Let your mind wash away all of troubles and irritation of the day – picture it washing out to sea – and replace it with whatever the senses are experiencing at that very moment - the warmth of the water, the tranquil sounds, and the feeling of being unrestricted by ties or hosiery.

Everyone's different with how they meditate. Some like the guided imagery, while others want to have nothing to think about. Some like to use a mantra they can repeat throughout the meditation process. See what works best for you and then use that as your staple for better sleep and less stress.

Rule #5 – Become a Master at Time Management

During the Huffington Post surveys about sleep and stress, they noticed that most people started with phrases like, "Not enough time to..." Time is one thing we need more of and have less of in this day and age.

We have no time to relax. We push ourselves from the time our feet hit the floor in the morning right up until we go to bed – and we never get to bed on time. Instead, we give ourselves a minimal amount of sleep hours – and much of that is spent tossing and turning due to the stress of what all we couldn't accomplish in the day.

If you'll get firm with yourself and look at how much time you waste during the day, or how much time you're not as productive as you should be, then you'll free up more time for sleep.

Notice that didn't say, "free up more time to get tasks done." Many of you will learn new time management skills and forget to learn your lesson about sleep. Instead, you'll pack in more on your to-do list.

Keep a diary or journal of your daily routine. Notice all the times when you're surfing the web or standing around chatting with co-workers. That's time that you could be spending really accomplishing things so that once your day is done, you are rewarded with free time – "me time" – to pamper and nurture your body and mind.

You might also find that when you implement the other rules here, along with proper sleep hygiene, you'll be able to get more done throughout the day. That's because your mental clarity improves and you tend to have more energy to tackle whatever the day may bring.

Rule #6 – Allow Deep Breathing to Replace Naps

There are some people who get in the habit of taking a daily nap – primarily because they've heard that power napping can help them achieve their goals for the day.

This might be true for many people. But if sleep eludes you, then naps could be causing the problem. A 10-minute power nap where you're basically just shutting your eyes and deep breathing is beneficial.

Going to bed for 2-4 hours in the middle of the day is a recipe for disaster. You'll never be able to go to bed at a regular bedtime and you'll lie there frustrated and annoyed that you can't go to sleep. It's a hard habit to break.

Try using deep breathing to energize yourself whenever you're in an afternoon slump. Breathe from your diaphragm and try to watch how often you're using shallow breaths throughout the day.

Rule #7 – Focus on Nutrition for Better Sleep and Less Stress

Foods are one area where what you eat can benefit or damage *both* your sleep and stress levels. If you want to alleviate stress and get better sleep, you need to limit or avoid alcohol and caffeine and eat foods that will help with both!

That means eating good protein like turkey or lean chicken, salmon, avocados, nuts like almonds or walnuts, and apricots (which soothe your muscles). Regular meals are key, too. You want your blood sugar levels stabilized so that you don't have to deal with mood swings and energy highs and lows.



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