



Deep Sleep

Deep restorative sleep is quite delicious and as important to your health and well-being as air, food and water. Sleep is essential for optimal functioning of the immune system, the nervous system, the hormones that regulate body functions, and cellular replenishment. Sleep is also necessary for processing, metabolizing, and integrating emotion and learning from your day, as evidenced by the emotional and mental impairment that occurs with sleep deprivation. Lack of sleep due to sleep deprivation or sleep disorders takes a serious toll on work, relationships, productivity, health, and safety. Use of sleeping pills can cause drowsiness, memory problems, and dependence, can lose effectiveness over time, and can prevent you from getting deep restorative sleep. When you sleep deeply and well, the body-mind is refreshed, alert and ready to face the day. While sleep requirements are unique to each person, sleep experts generally recommend the following tips for deep sleep:

Set Your Inner Sleep Rhythm

- To re-set and optimize your body's sleep-wake cycle, go to bed at about the same time, and arise at the same time every day of the week (including weekends) no matter how much you've slept the night before.
- The ancient healing system of Ayurveda suggests falling asleep before 10:00pm, during *Kapha* time, with its deep, calming influence. If you stay up past 10pm, you may experience *Pitta*'s activating influence by getting a "second wind" as well as food cravings. Being asleep by 10pm may result in requiring less sleep overall.

Create Conditions for Soothing Sleep

- Create a sleep-promoting environment that is quiet, dark, cool and comfortable. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow. Allow for fresh air and good ventilation.
- Protect your need for deep sleep from intrusive pets, noise, or other distractions. If your partner's snoring or restlessness regularly disrupts your sleep, consider using ear-plugs, a white noise machine, sleeping in separate rooms, or referring them to a health care professional for evaluation for a sleep disorder.
- Because sleep requires surrendering into deep silent stillness, your nervous system needs to quiet. As you decrease the activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System (which mobilizes the body's energy and resources during times of activity, stress and arousal,) the Parasympathetic Nervous System turns on to support relaxation, rest, and deep sleep.
- Clear your mind. Begin a daily evening practice of emptying your mind onto paper with thoughts, feelings, to-do lists, and intentions for the next day, to avert intrusive thoughts in the night. Practice non-attachment to thinking – when thoughts arise, label them "thinking" and let them go.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping and intimate time in order to strengthen the association between bed and sleep. Remove work materials, television, and computers from the sleeping environment. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety, remove it from your bedroom.
- Avoid arousing activities before bedtime such as working, paying bills, competitive games, problem-solving, or activating conversations or phone calls.
- Begin to reduce stimulation as the evening progresses. Avoid exposure to bright light before bedtime because it signals the brain that it is time to awaken, not to sleep. As the evening progresses, turn off the television and computer, dim lights, and transition from active to relaxing activities such as reading a pleasurable book, listening to soothing music, or meditating.

Establish a Bedtime Ritual

- Establish a regular soothing bedtime ritual. A relaxing activity right before bedtime, conducted away from bright lights, helps separate your sleep time from activities that cause excitement, stress or anxiety that can make it more difficult to fall asleep or remain asleep.

- Enjoy what is pleasurable to your senses. Light candles, a fire, or sage/incense to clear the energy of your day. Enjoy a warm bath or hot tub early enough that you are no longer over-heated.
- Doing gentle stretching can help shift out of the mind and release tension from your day. Reclining with your legs elevated, such as lying on the floor with your legs vertical up a wall or elevated on a soft chair or pillows, can re-balance circulation and energy, and refresh the brain. Focusing on gentle breathing and using an eye pillow can deepen the relaxation. Doing a gentle inversion like this also helps with insomnia.
- Consider a relaxation practice such as meditation, gentle yoga, or a guided relaxation audio tape. (See Handout on “Support Through CDs”) Seek out a trained professional to learn relaxation practices.
- If you awaken during the night, greet the night hours gently with acceptance, compassion, and surrender. Keep the lights dim and your body-mind quiet. Journal unwanted thoughts, then set the paper aside and redirect your focus. Choose soothing activities that cultivate ease, comfort, and well being – meditate, enjoy relaxation practices, or listen to soothing music or a guided relaxation.

Daytime Practices for Deep Sleep

- Get daily sunlight and fresh air (even on cloudy/rainy days) to help stimulate the pineal gland that regulates your sleep-wake rhythms.
- If you want to end your day ready to sleep, enjoy 30 minutes of cardiovascular movement during the day, but not within three hours before bedtime. Regular exercise helps to discharge built-up stress chemicals in the body. And, since exercise is physically demanding, the brain increases the amount of time in deep sleep – the phase of sleep during which your body repairs itself.
- Maintain healthy nutrition of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before sleep so that the activation of digestion is complete, and your physiology is quiet by bedtime. If you must eat before sleeping, choose something light and quickly digestible such as fruit.
- Hydrate well throughout the day so you are not awakened at night by thirst or the need to use the bathroom.
- Reduce or eliminate the “Big 5” that the mind may want but that create physiological agitation in the mind and body: nicotine, alcohol, caffeine, sugar, and chemical additives and preservatives – especially close to bedtime.
- Consume less or no caffeine, particularly late in the afternoon. Remember that coffee, sodas, tea, chocolate, and de-caffeinated beverages have caffeine in them.
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol and nicotine, especially close to bedtime.
- Avoid naps, particularly in the late afternoon or evening.
- Keep a sleep diary to identify your sleep habits and patterns, as well as daytime sleepiness, that you can share with your health care practitioner.

Sleep Challenges

If you have trouble falling asleep, maintaining sleep, awaken earlier than you wish, feel un-refreshed after sleep, or suffer from excessive sleepiness during the day or when you wish to be alert, it is very important that you discuss your concerns and treatment options with your health care professional. Discussing your concerns will help to determine whether anxiety, depression, or an underlying health condition or disease is causing the problem.

Sleep Resources

- ***Handout: “Support through CDs: Meditation, Relaxation, Self Acceptance, and Grief”***
Visit www.dharmaspirt.com and click on “Resources” and “Handouts”
- ***Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times***, by Judith Lasater, Ph.D. – restorative yoga poses
- ***www.sleepfoundation.org***: Learn About: Insomnia, Sleep for All Ages, Sleep Disorders, Why is Sleep Important? Am I Getting Good Sleep?
- ***Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic***: www.stanfordhospital.com (650) 723-6601