

SLEEP WELL

YOUR ROUND-THE-CLOCK
GUIDE TO A HEALTHY SLUMBER
BY MICHELE MEYER



H heard the expression “You snooze, you lose? Actually, when it comes to your health, it’s quite the opposite.

“Your life’s quality depends on your alertness, and alertness depends on getting a good night’s sleep,” says Susan Zafarlotfi, Ph.D., clinical director of the Institute for Sleep-Wake Disorders at Hackensack University Medical Center. “Sleep is as important as breathing, eating and drinking. Yet our society slights it.”

Of course, sleep does take time. We can satiate hunger, thirst or lust in minutes, but solid shut-eye requires eight hours-plus, notes Dr. Zafarlotfi. That time was easier to find in the era before electricity, when darkness outdoors had more power to make us sleepy. But these days, all-night TV, online shopping, texting and other modern distractions have helped to shave Americans’ average shut-eye from eight-and-a-half hours nightly to less than seven.

That’s a problem, because sleep is critical. Says Jeffrey Salizzoni, M.D., a sleep specialist at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center: “As early sleep researcher Allan Rechtschaffen pointed out, ‘If sleep doesn’t serve an absolutely vital function, then it’s the biggest mistake that the evolutionary process ever made.’”

Rest assured, your body needs a symphony of sleep to perform properly. Like a conductor, your brain directs lessons, imprints memories, reviews emotions, hones decisions and repairs wear-and-tear from the preceding day. This tune-up alternates between 90-minute cycles of restorative deep sleep and mind-rebooting rapid-eye-movement sleep (as eyes dart beneath your lids). If you stop before the finale, as most of us do, you wreck more than rhythm.

“The body needs time to complete all phases of sleep for muscle repair, memory consolidation and the release of hormones regulating growth and appetite,” Dr. Salizzoni says. If it doesn’t get enough, weight and blood pressure rise along with the risk of depression, while resistance to illness, mood, judgment, reaction time, logic and creativity stumble.

Three-fourths of Americans over 30 complain that drowsiness harms their work life—and four out of five say it damages their sex life, reports the latest National Sleep Foundation (NSF) poll. Yet despite knowing that more sleep is better, most settle for less. Four out

of five adults report getting amounts of sleep that experts consider insufficient.

Sleep deprivation can even cause catastrophe. It is thought to have contributed to the errors that led to the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker disaster, the 1986 *Challenger* Space Shuttle explosion and the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown that same year. Some 100,000 auto accidents yearly are linked to nodding off at the wheel, causing at least 1,550 fatalities, 71,000 injuries and \$12.5 billion in resultant losses, reports the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

“It’s possible to fall into a three- or four-second doze without realizing it,” says James B. Maas, Ph.D., a Cornell University psychology professor who is co-author with Rebecca S. Robbins of

**“THE BODY
NEEDS TIME TO
COMPLETE ALL
PHASES OF SLEEP
FOR MUSCLE
REPAIR, MEMORY
CONSOLIDATION
AND THE RELEASE
OF HORMONES.”
—JEFFREY SALIZZONI, M.D.**

Sleep for Success. “At 65 miles per hour, that’s enough time to travel the length of a football field unconscious. Add one drink of alcohol to six hours of sleep and you drive as if you’d had six drinks.”

**FOR A HEALTHY SLEEP LIFE,
FOLLOW THIS SCHEDULE:**

7 a.m. Work forward eight hours from bedtime to determine when you should rise, and stick with that wake-up time. “Waking up at the same time is vital,” says Dr. Zafarlotfi. “Otherwise you go to bed later and later.” (On weekends, get up within 45 minutes of your normal time or you disrupt your internal clock, she cautions.) Caffeine can rev your motor, but nature’s java is light, which sparks the sleep-regulating hormone melatonin. Open blinds, raise wattage or head outdoors.

2 p.m. Cut off caffeine now or risk fragmented sleep from overstimulating the

central nervous system. “People often don’t realize how much caffeine they’re ingesting,” Dr. Zafarlotfi says. A “grande” (medium-sized) brewed coffee from Starbucks has 320 milligrams of caffeine, triple that of the average home brew. Extra-Strength Excedrin has 130 mg. in two pills. Mountain Dew has 71 mg. in 12 oz. and Red Bull has 10 mg. per ounce. “But you can’t consume enough chocolate to disturb your sleep,” Dr. Salizzoni says. An 8-oz. hot cocoa and 1.55 oz. Hershey’s bar each have 9 mg.

2:30 p.m. This is your last chance to nap unless you work nights. Limit shut-eye to 30 minutes to awaken refreshed. “Sleeping for more than an hour can make you groggy from the same type of sleep inertia you feel in the morning,” Dr. Zafarlotfi says. “Nap more than two hours and you stay up later that night.”

3 p.m. Watch those afternoon snacks. You may crave sweet treats due to a sleep shortage, warns Dr. Salizzoni. Such a deficit lowers appetite-suppressing hormone leptin and raises hunger-igniting ghrelin.

4 p.m. If bathroom visits interrupt your night’s sleep, this may be the time to take an anticholinergic medication your doctor has prescribed. Such medications—the brands Detrol, Vesicare and Sanctura, for example—soothe the bladder, letting you store more urine and take fewer bathroom breaks, says David Shin, M.D., assistant professor of urology at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and a physician at Hackensack University Medical Center. (Frequent urination can be a result of diabetes, antidepressant medications or blood pressure-lowering drugs.)

6 p.m. Last call for alcohol, which knocks you out faster but makes sleep shallow. A diuretic, booze also increases the urge to urinate, says Dr. Shin. Stick to one serving. Besides, it’s time for dinner so that your body can fully digest before bed. A full stomach can cause indigestion or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), Dr. Zafarlotfi says.

6:30 p.m. This is your last opportunity to begin a workout. “Exercise is excellent for sleep and adds years to your life,” Dr. Salizzoni says. But time it »

5 SLEEP DISORDERS

» **INSOMNIA** is the inability to fall asleep or remain asleep. According to the National Center for Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health, 30 to 40 percent of U.S. adults report experiencing insomnia symptoms in a given year and 10 to 15 percent complain of chronic insomnia.

» **SLEEP APNEA** affects 18 million Americans. The most common type is obstructive sleep apnea, in which obstructions in or near the pharynx block breathing, resulting in frequent drops of 10 seconds or more in oxygen, gasps for air and brief awakenings. Most sufferers are men over 40, but weight gain and a drop in progesterone at perimenopause may cause apnea in women. "Ninety percent of cases are undiagnosed," says Jeffrey Salizzoni, M.D., a sleep specialist at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center. Weight loss or mouthguards help by creating airspace behind the tongue. In more severe cases, patients need a mask connected by a tube to an assistive breathing machine to keep the pharynx from collapsing. In rare instances, the patient may require surgery.

» **UPPER AIRWAY RESISTANCE SYNDROME** is a milder form of reduced airflow, with no drop in oxygen.

» **RESTLESS LEG SYNDROME** is an uncontrollable urge to rub or move your legs during evenings and move limbs at night. Oral medications can treat the disorder, which may be aggravated by antidepressants. About one-third of adults over 60 have this condition.

» **NARCOLEPSY** Because of heredity, infection or immune disorders, one in 200 people may have narcolepsy, a condition in which they fall asleep while talking, eating or otherwise moving, Dr. Salizzoni says. They may experience hallucinations or brief paralysis during sleep.



right because it boosts your internal thermometer, and a natural drop in body temperature signals the body that it's time to sleep. Moderate to vigorous cardiovascular activity 150 minutes weekly improves snoozes by 65 percent, according to estimates by Oregon State University researchers in last December's issue of the journal *Mental Health and Physical Activity*.

8 p.m. Cut off all liquids. The need to urinate disrupts Zzzs in 28 percent of adults, rising to 41 percent of those over 60. You should also stop snacking around this time.

9 p.m. Head to your bedroom, where lights should be dimmed to less than 60 volts to raise your melatonin levels. Avoid bold colors, noise and distractions. The room should be dim and at a comfort-

able temperature. Then wind your day down with a ritual. Take a long shower or bath, do yoga or gentle stretches, listen to soothing music or read till you feel drowsy. "But don't read a suspense novel before bed," says Dr. Zafarlotfi. "Try something mindless that won't have you wondering what will happen next."

Write down—then dismiss—things weighing on your mind. "Night is not time to think about the next day's agenda," she says. "Keep your worry notebook handy, but wait until morning to review it."

To protect your sleep from bathroom-break interruptions, you might try raising your feet for five to 10 minutes before bed to return fluids from your legs to your kidneys and circulatory system so you can empty your bladder before bed.

10 p.m. Shut off TVs, laptops, cell phones and other flickering or blue light-

emitting devices. They're a culprit in poor sleep for 95 percent who use them within an hour of bedtime, reveals the NSF's survey. "The light mimics light therapy we use to keep shift workers awake. It stimulates your mind and disrupts your circadian clock," Dr. Zafarlotfi says.

If you're restless, imagine reclining in a beach cabana as a gentle ocean breeze caresses your face.

4 a.m. If you wake, inhale gently through your nose, counting to four. Your belly should expand. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then exhale audibly through your mouth for eight seconds, leading your belly to fall. Take deeper, slower and more regular breaths. Count backwards from 100. "If you're still awake after 15 minutes, head to a dimly lit area and read until you feel sleepy," Dr. Salizzoni says. "Then go back to bed." +

THE HORMONE-SLEEP CONNECTION

HERE'S A HOT FLASH:

Hormones could be zapping your Zzzs. Falling levels of female hormones estrogen and progesterone are linked to insomnia.

Progesterone, which drops during perimenopause, is a natural sleeping pill, triggering neurotransmitters in the brain that reduce middle-of-the-night awakenings. Hot flashes—a symptom of drops in estrogen at that time of life—may wake up women. Estrogen also boosts feel-good neurotransmitter serotonin that helps us unwind—and is converted into melatonin, the brain chemical that promotes shut-eye. Thinner and more irritated bladder tissues may boost bathroom urges overnight. Pain, arthritis and other health problems during this time can also disrupt sleep.

APPROACHES TO CONSIDER:

» **Hormone replacement:** “Some women

get a response with replacement therapy at low levels,” says Englewood Hospital and Medical Center sleep specialist Jeffrey Salizzoni, M.D. Consult your doctor about estrogen/progesterone pills or patches in the year or two before and after your last period. Some research shows that Prometrium, a plant-derived progesterone-only pill, also helps women sleep more deeply and with fewer interruptions.

» **Herbal remedies:** Alas, the record isn't promising for most over-the-counter herbals, Dr. Salizzoni says. An exception is melatonin, a natural substance our brain secretes at sunset to make us sleepy. The ideal amount is 150 to 300 micrograms taken three to five hours before bed.

» **Prescription drugs:** While over-the-counter meds (generally containing antihistamines) backfire because they

cause lingering drowsiness, Ambien, Lunesta and shorter-acting Sonata can help you fall asleep. “These are a last resort,” says Susan Zafarlotfi, Ph.D., clinical director of the Institute for Sleep-Wake Disorders at Hackensack University Medical Center. “Don't take them for more than three weeks and don't take them nightly. They're habituating, so you form a tolerance, leading you to increase dosages with less benefit.”

» **Keeping cool:** You can short-circuit a hot flash by placing an ice pack under your pillow. Turn over the pillow for instant chill. A cool pre-bed shower also drops core temperature. During the night, open-weave bamboo and non-clingy natural fabrics can wick away moisture. Brands include Select Comfort Lyocell sheets and CoolSets, Cool Nights and DryDreams nighties. Avoid synthetics, silk or wool, which retain water. +