

THE HAPPY SECRETS TO A GOOD NIGHT

We're talking sleep, plain and simple and more specifically getting a GOOD night's sleep. Time and time again lack of sleep or an inability to sleep well comes up as a potential symptom of stress from many of our workshop attendees. For some it's explained away as "I'm too busy to get to bed early", "or I'm expected to be contactable 24/7 and if I don't respond immediately it just piles up". But unless you're on-call or your job involves working with different time zones (though you still need to set boundaries to your availability), there's no excuse to be checking emails outside of work hours; you need to give yourself time to wind down before you go to bed.

WHY? Sleep researchers suggest that inadequate sleep impairs our functioning, and can lead to a compromised immune system making us more susceptible to illness. Obesity, hyper-tension and a host of other serious physical ailments are linked to poor sleep. Moreover according to neuroscientists too little sleep negatively impacts aspects of higher level thinking, including our ability to concentrate and be attentive. The old adage "I'll sleep on it" is true as neuroscience informs us that while we are asleep our brain is working hard, consolidating memories, learnings and insight from events of the day.

The ideal wind down time according to some sleep researchers is 60-90 minutes. Reflect for a moment on how we help babies or young children to bed — we have a ritual: we reduce stimulating play, perhaps give them a bath, dress them in cosy jammies, and read them a bed time story (usually with a happy ending!), before sending them off to ZZ land. Now we're not suggesting you don a onesie and scare the life out of your friends and family, but try these tips to improve your sleep:

CREATE A RITUAL: just as we do for young children — see paragraph above — create your own ritual, avoiding stimulants such as coffee, alcohol.

AVOID BLUE LIGHT: For example your smart phone, computer. Research has found that exposure to devices suppresses the body's ability to produce melatonin, a hormone that works to make us feel sleepy.

READ OR LISTEN TO RELAXING MUSIC: Not reading work materials such as reports or emails, but something light or that provides escapism for you.

LOWER THE TEMPERATURE IN YOUR BEDROOM: Studies have shown we sleep better in a room where the temperature is cool rather than warm

KEEP A NOTEBOOK BESIDE YOUR BED: This works well for people who wake in the middle of the night with a brilliant idea or suddenly remember something important they MUST remember for the next day/week etc. Jot it down — this frees your mind and allows you to go back to sleep.

KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL: If you find yourself ruminating about negative events that have recently occurred, recording (just before you go to bed) what good or pleasant things happened to you that day can be really beneficial to getting a good night's sleep.

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