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You Need Your Sleep

In theory, the average person spends one-third of their life sleeping. In reality, millions of people suffer from inadequate and/or poor sleep, which can have a variety of short- and long-term consequences on their health and well-being. Here are a few suggestions on how to ensure a good night's sleep - every night:

Talk to Your Doctor. If you're having a problem sleeping, you should make sure your doctor is aware of it. They may recommend keeping a sleep journal for a few weeks. Include a description of your general attitude/emotions that day (happy, sad, overwhelmed, in control, etc.), the time you went to sleep, the amount of sleep (hours) you experienced, the number of times you woke up, if you felt the sleep was restful, significant activities that day, and any medication use.

Regular chiropractic adjustments help keep your nervous system at a calmer, more functioning state. Abnormal musculoskeletal function will take precious energy away from the normal sleep process. Studies have shown that many sleep disorders, depression and various anxieties are removed or controlled with proper chiropractic manipulation.

The Fan Is Your Friend. The simple use of a fan blowing in your face (well, not right into your face) provides several major benefits, according to current literature. First, your face is covered with millions of tiny hairs - even if you shave every day. Each one of those little hairs is connected to your sympathetic nervous system. (When a cat becomes frightened, notice that they arch their back and

all of their hair stands up.) When you blow a fan on these hairs, they become "overstimulated" and will go through a phase called sensory adaptation. This constant stimulation will eventually force your body to ignore it.

The Power of White Noise. White noise provides a distraction to your body and allows for a deep sleep. Just like the sensory adaptation that occurs when using a fan, a constant white noise - like a waterfall or other repeating noise - can help sedate or calm the auditory system. The noise will act like a jamming system and not allow your ears to focus on unnecessary sounds.

Lights On, Lights Off. It is often a personal preference whether to have lights on or off when you go to bed. For some people, the faint, barely detectable flicker of an incandescent light is important; just like the fan and the white noise, the eyes are very susceptible to sensory adaptation and will give up if "overstimulated" by the right type of lighting, night light, bathroom fluorescent light, candles, campfire, television, etc. It is sort of a visual "lullaby" to your mind.

No Liquids Before Bed. Waking up to go the bathroom is a touchy situation. After all, if you have to go, you have to go. But if you can't drink enough water during the day, squeezing it in before bed is a costly mistake. It is more damaging to wake up two or three times during the night to urinate than to not drink enough water that day. Not having to wake up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night increases your chances of experiencing sound, uninterrupted sleep.

Dial It Down. It is important to avoid taking stimulants of any kind prior to going to bed. Drinking coffee, caffeinated tea and soda drinks will all prevent a normal sleep cycle from occurring (or even starting, in some cases). And some people will even use a commercial stimulant known as a "diet pill" to enhance their fat loss capability. Well, guess what? A poor night's sleep will reduce your body's natural production of human growth hormone, which will hinder your ability to lose fat.

If you're struggling to sleep and are suffering the consequences, talk to your doctor, who may recommend these and other strategies (no, not counting sheep) for getting a good night's rest each and every night.

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It Starts With the Core

The core is the center of the body, where all movement begins. When you lift a heavy grocery bag, reach for a suitcase, pick up one of your children, move a bookcase or throw a ball, the core muscles should activate even before your limbs are in motion. Healthy core muscles will provide your body with the structural integrity and support to your spine for everything from walking and running to lifting to standing to sitting. Let's review five of the more effective core exercises:



Traditional Ab Curl: Lie on your back with your hands behind the low back. Don't flatten the back to the floor. Keep one knee bent and the other knee straight. Tighten the abs and slowly crunch up from the sternum (that T-shaped bone in the center of your lower chest, also known as the breast bone), bringing your shoulder blades off the ground. Don't forget to breath in and out. *12-15 repetitions, 1 set.*

On-Your-Back Bent-Leg Knee Raise: Lie on your back with your head and neck relaxed and your hands above your head, holding onto the sides of a bench or a piece of heavy furniture. Your feet should be flat on the floor. Use your lower abdominal muscles to raise your knees up toward your rib cage and face, the heels toward the butt, and toes to the shin. Then slowly lower your feet back to the starting position. As your feet lightly touch the floor, repeat. *12 reps, 1 set.*

Plank: Start to get in a push-up position, but bend your elbows and rest your weight on your forearms instead of your hands. Your body should form a straight line from your shoulders to your ankles. Pull your abdominals in; imagine you're trying to move your belly button back to your spine. Continue to brace the abdominals and put the low back in the neutral position. Hold this position for an increasing length of time up to a maximum of one minute, breathing steadily. As you build endurance, try to do at least a 60-second set. *2-3 sets, 1 minute per set.*

Stability Ball Push-Ups: These are your basic push-ups, but you're doing them with your feet on a stability ball. Keep your body straight - don't let your hips sag or stick your butt up in the air - to max out on the exercise's core-strengthening benefits. Do as many as you can with strict form. *1 set to failure.*

Side Bridge: Lie on your nondominant side with your forearm on the floor under your shoulder. Support your weight with that forearm and the outside edge of the same side foot (your legs should be stacked one on top of the other). Your body should form a straight line from head to ankles. Contract your abs and glutes in as far as you can, and push your hips off the floor. Create a straight line from ankle to shoulder and keep your head in line with your spine. Hold this position for an increasing length of time up to a maximum of one minute, breathing steadily. Relax and lower under control. Repeat on your other side. *2-3 sets, 1 minute per set.*

Don't be afraid of core training, even if you're a beginner. Actually, if you're just starting an exercise regimen, core training is the place to start, because it will make everything easier. Your doctor can answer any questions you may have regarding the value of core exercises and how to properly perform these and other core exercises.

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Healthy 10-Minute Meals

How can you prepare healthy meals in a pinch? One of the foundational rules for getting a healthy meal on the table in 10 minutes or less is proper planning. Here's an easy way to get started: Brainstorm six to eight menus you can choose from whenever the need arises. Having that many options allows you to avoid repetition and gives you the freedom to mix things up. When you're planning menus, also think about how many different meals you can create using a limited number of ingredients; that way, you can prep several meals at the same time.



Once you've chosen your menus, shop and prep in advance. That means doing everything from grilling chicken to chopping up vegetables to boiling rice or pasta. In some cases, you can completely finish the meal so it only requires reheating during your busy evenings. You can decide how much time you'll have and which foods can be partially prepared and which can be completely prepared in advance and still last for as long as you need them.

Here are a few healthy meal suggestions that are easy to prepare in a pinch and provide your family with sound nutrition:

Turkey Taco Salad: Cook lean or extra-lean ground turkey thoroughly with seasoning. Crumble it and arrange in the center of a bed of lettuce (which can be pre-washed and bagged). Have the kids add warm or cool pinto, kidney, white or garbanzo beans. Garnish the plate with baked taco chips and salsa, which can be used as a dressing. Add a small amount of shredded cheese to top it all off.

Chicken Wrap: Slice and shred a pre-cooked chicken (you can pick it up at the store on a weekday evening or prep it on Sunday). Place in a large bowl and mix with the following ingredients: half cup red bell pepper (thinly sliced); 3 medium carrots and 1 cucumber, cut into matchsticks; 3 tablespoons of bottled vinaigrette; and shredded lettuce. Warm tortillas (they can be gluten-free) wraps or flatbread. To raise the veggie count for this meal, add a salad and a healthy salad dressing.

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