

[IMAGE]

Three Ways to Improve Your Sleep

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Sleep is essential to your body's repair and restoration. If you don't sleep, your body starts to feel unhealthy and chaotic and worse yet, you can really get yourself ill. So, if you have trouble sleeping, how can you address that?

One of the most important things about sleep is that you have to establish good habits. We have a term for that in medicine and it's called "good sleep hygiene." Just like you have oral hygiene and your overall body hygiene to attend to, you should similarly see your sleep routine as something as important as brushing your teeth or taking a shower or bath.

Sleep is not optional. Let's first start with that. If your body needs 8 hours of sleep, don't force it to only get 6 hours of sleep just because you would prefer that. Every body is different and some bodies need more sleep and some need less. So, how can you tell how many hours of sleep you need?

When you go on your next vacation, don't set an alarm and don't stay up late watching TV or partying or reading. I want you to naturally see when you get tired, then go to bed. Then see when you naturally wake up in the morning without an alarm and feel good. You might need a few days into the vacation before you can test this out since your body may be jet-lagged if you traveled far and you may still be wound up from just finishing work.

sleep - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark So, give yourself a few days then test this out. However many hours your body naturally sleeps on its own without an alarm or interruptions is how much your body needs to rest every day. So keep that in mind the next time you want to train your body to sleep less, you need to remember that every person is programmed differently and you can't veer too drastically from that or your body will be too tired to do all the wonderful things you plan for yourself every day.

Finally, try to keep your sleep area as clutter-free and distraction-free as possible. You should make time to quiet your body before going to bed so that you can fall asleep easier. If you are doing computer work or watching suspenseful shows or dealing with stressful things right before bed, you will have a harder time falling asleep or you will have more fitful sleep throughout the night. I liken going to sleep to landing an

airplane. So, if you have a stressful life or are dealing with stressful things, you should take some time before bed to calm yourself and quiet your environment by doing relaxing things and turning down the lights in the room to slowly get your body into a restful state. Similar to landing an airplane, you don't go from high altitude to landing quickly. You slowly land the plane so you can ease into the landing...you should do the same with sleep.

So, the three things you should do for better sleep are these:

1. Make sleep a priority so that you plan for it.
2. Remember your body needs the amount of sleep that it needs. So, stop trying to train it...you should listen to it and give it what it needs.
3. Ease into sleep. Make sure that you quiet yourself and your environment before sleep so you can have a restful night of sleep, because if you're going to take the time out of your busy schedule to sleep, you might as well make the quality of sleep good.

Sleep is a complicated thing...there are so many factors that can make it good...or make it bad. Make sure to take the effort to make it good, or at least learn how to make your sleep good. In the long run, that's what's going to keep both your mind and body healthy. Just remember, sleep is when your body repairs itself. I think that fact alone makes the effort of ensuring sleep super important, don't you?

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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