

March 2009 Newsletter



Here is Tor Hassell, hard at work building up his sleep reserves. For someone so young (8 weeks) he demonstrates an impressive grasp of technique.

Springing forward

It would be a good idea to follow Tor's example (see photo above) and start catching up on your sleep. Daylight saving started on March 8th and you may have some catching up to do. Actually, it's always a good idea to have some spare sleep hanging around – it is great medicine. In fact, the case for sleep is looking pretty impressive.

Evidence shows that inadequate sleep is associated with problems like obesity, depression, insulin resistance and diabetes, high blood pressure, high inflammation levels, and greater susceptibility to infection and other attacks on our immune systems. What with the freezing and snowing and sneezing and blowing, most of us could use more sleep.

Also, people who sleep less than about 7 hours a night develop much more calcification in their coronary arteries, a measure of arterial damage and predictive of a greater risk of heart disease.¹ Think of sleep as an important nutrient with a recommended nightly allowance of 7 – 9 hours. And can you think of a more enjoyable supplement?

Steps to a better sleep

Insomnia can be a sign of an underlying disease, so a discussion with your physician is often appropriate. If there are specific symptoms that are keeping you awake, like pain or restless legs, then symptom-directed treatment can be helpful. If you follow the suggestions below and sleep *still* eludes you, there are other behavioral techniques and medications that may be helpful.

- Have a sleep schedule. Go to bed 7 – 8 hours before you plan to get up. Avoid daytime naps.
- Avoid afternoon or evening caffeine. Some find that caffeine-free herbal tea is helpful.
- Check all prescriptions, medications and herbs to see if they can be blamed for your insomnia.
- Try to resolve concerns and worries before bedtime. Lack of sleep will only intensify stress.
- Get daily exercise, preferably thirty to 60 minutes in the first half of the day. Exercise outdoors in the daylight is probably more effective for enhancing sleep than indoor exercise. Some find that exercise close to bedtime makes sleeping more difficult.
- Keep the television out of the bedroom, and have the bedroom as dark as possible.
- Keep alcohol intake to one drink per day. Alcohol has an unpredictable effect on sleep.
- If you can't sleep, do quiet activities such as reading, or listening to relaxing music. Avoid watching TV and turn your computer off.
- Have a bedtime snack. What works the best for some people is a combination of protein, fat, and calcium; yogurt with some raw nuts, for example, or an apple with cheese.
- A deep hot bath for 20 - 30 minutes in the late evening improves sleep for many people.

¹ King, C.R. JAMA 2008;300:2859-2866

Light therapy

Exposure to bright light when you wake up can be effective sleep therapy. Depending on the time of year, this can be achieved with a walk outside or other exposure to outside light first thing in the morning. Another way to use this effect is to sit in front of a 10,000 lux light for 30 – 40 minutes. This is the same kind of light that is used to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder. (There are a number of sources of these special lights, including www.bio-light.com)

Nutritional supplements for insomnia

Nutritional supplements sometimes seem to help insomnia, but substantive evidence is poor. The main ones to consider trying are:

- **Melatonin:** take 0.5 to 5.0 mg between 6-9 pm. (That is a broad dose range but it is hard to predict what dose will work.) Our impression is that this works better for those over 70.
- **Valerian:** an herb that has been widely used to enhance sleep, and has some supportive evidence. Try 600-900 mg of standardized valerian (0.8% valeric acids) at bedtime.²
- **Hops:** take about 50 mg at night. This herb is often combined with valerian.
- **Tryptophan:** a dose of 1 gm at bedtime has also been reportedly effective for some.
- **'Calms Forte':** A homeopathic sleep aid for which there is no experimental evidence but which some patients find helpful. It is very safe, inexpensive, and available in natural food stores.

Miles' cancer research update

My work with the Providence Cancer Center and the Integrative Medicine Program continues, thanks to the generous support from so many. The seventh patient has just enrolled in our pilot study to confirm whether we can lessen the damage to the inside of the mouth and throat (mucositis) of patients receiving radiation therapy for head and neck cancer, using a mixture of yogurt, glutamine, honey, and butter. If successful, this will have broad application for reducing the suffering associated with cancer treatment.

² Kamel, N. Am J Med 2006;119:463-69

Cookbook update

The second edition of *Good Food, Great Medicine* is now available. This new edition is about 30% larger than the first and has a new chapter, *Preventing Heart Disease and Heart Attacks*, built around a comprehensive 10-step plan that combines food, exercise, lifestyle, nutritional supplements, and medication decisions to prevent, treat – and potentially reverse – heart disease. There are also about a dozen new recipes and an expanded index. Books are available in our office or on-line at www.goodfoodgreatmedicine.com.

Upcoming Speaking Events

3/3/2009– NEXT Steps Against Breast Cancer: Miles Hassell, MD and Ken Weizer, ND: *Nutrition and Exercise Today to Reduce Risk and Improve Survival*. Providence St. Vincent Cancer Center.

3/8/2009– Cedar Mill Bible Church: Miles Hassell, MD: *Boomer Generation Caring for their Parents*. Portland, Oregon.

3/17/2009– McMinnville Physician's Organization: Miles Hassell, MD: *Chocolate and Red Wine*. McMinnville, Oregon.

3/18/2009– Providence Newberg Medical Center: Miles Hassell, MD and Mary Malinski, RN, LMT: *Community Health Fair* (4-6pm) and *Eat and Move for Good Health: What Choices Really Matter?* (6-8pm) Register by calling (503)537-1673. Newberg, Oregon.

3/19/2009– Providence Cancer Center Integrative Medicine Program: Miles Hassell, MD and Cindy Reuter, ND, MSOM, L.Ac., RD: *Making Your Way Through The Supplement Jungle: Vitamins, Minerals and Herbs*. Portland Providence Medical Center. This talk is open to the public and free. For more information go to: www.providence.org/integrativemedicine and choose the 'classes' link. You may also register by calling the Providence Resource Line @ (503)574-6595.

3/31/2009– Providence St. Vincent Medical Center, Internal Medicine Grand Rounds: Miles Hassell, MD: *Treating Ischemic Heart Disease: Which Lifestyle Choices Really Matter?* Portland, Oregon.

4/6 and 4/7/2009– Providence Cardiovascular Symposium: Miles Hassell, MD: *The Lifestyle Prescription for Preventing and Reversing Heart Disease: Which Choices Really Matter?* Portland, Oregon.