

Get Enough Sleep

We *all* need an adequate daily dose

by Miles Hassell MD

This handout is excerpted from pages 56-57 and page 69 of *Good Food, Great Medicine* (3rd edition), a Mediterranean diet and lifestyle guide and cookbook. *Good Food, Great Medicine* is a practical, easy-to-read resource offering both the evidence and the tools to help prevent or reverse heart disease and type 2 diabetes, control high blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels, reduce risk of stroke, dementia, and cancer, and lose weight without deprivation. (For more principles to eat by, see *Fat Is Good, Bagels Are Bad* on the resources tab at goodfoodgreatmedicine.com)

LIFESTYLE CHOICE #9

SCHEDULE MORE SLEEP *and* **LESS SCREEN TIME**

Sleep is an essential nutrient our bodies can't store; we need a daily dose.

Goals:

- Implement as many as you can of the lifestyle suggestions for better sleep on the following pages.
- Schedule 7–9 hours of sleep daily.
- Shut down electronic media at least one hour before bedtime.
- If you have exhausted (no pun intended) all of these suggestions and are still having difficulty sleeping or if you are needing to take sleep medications on a regular basis, talk with your doctor about further assessment. (Untreated conditions like sleep apnea can cause other preventable medical complications.)

Sleep is an essential nutrient

A lot happens while we're sleeping that is critical to short-term performance as well as long-term health. Both our brains and our bodies need the cell repair and hormone regulation accomplished during sleep.

Can't find time for adequate sleep?

The goal is not just *more* sleep; the goal is *adequate* sleep, which is 7–9 hours. It's worth the effort - it may not come easily at first, but we can train our brain to adopt a new sleep-wake cycle, especially if we expose ourselves to more natural light during the day and less electric/electronic light at night.¹ Staying up late in front of a screen can have a delaying effect on our sleep hormone (melatonin), causing it to kick in late and then hang around the next morning when we don't want it.²

Increased risks associated with inadequate (less than 7 hours) sleep

- Heart disease and stroke³
- Higher death rates⁴
- Some cancers
- Depression
- Obesity⁵
- Insulin resistance and diabetes⁶
- Higher blood pressure
- More coronary artery calcification⁷ (a measure of arterial damage)
- Decreased mental performance
- Higher levels of inflammation
- Susceptibility to infection⁸

¹ Wright, K.P. et al. *Curr Biol* 2013;doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2013.06.039

² Gooley, J.J. et al. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab* 2011;96:E463-E472

³ Hoevenaar-Blom, M.P. et al. *Eur J Prev Cardiol* 2013;doi:10.1177/204748731 (MORGEN study)

⁴ Tamakoshi, A. and Ohno, Y. *Sleep* 2004;27:51-4

⁵ Carter, P.J. et al. *BMJ* 2011;342:d2712 (FLAME study)

⁶ Liu, A. et al. *Metabolism* 2013;62:1553-6

⁷ King, C.R. et al. *JAMA* 2008;300:2859-66

⁸ Cohen, S. et al. *Arch Intern Med* 2009;169:62-7

Cut screen time (TV/cell/computer)

Eliminating or reducing screen time will not only free up time to sleep, it also helps reduce our risk of type 2 diabetes¹ and contributes to significant weight loss.² Watching television has even been shown to increase the risk of all-cause mortality!³ Reading books (at least the paper kind) does not appear to have the adverse physical effects associated with television and computer time.⁴

Rethink your screen time

Television and other kinds of screen-based entertainment are a lot like candy: they're addictive, have no nutritional value, and are strongly associated with weight gain,⁵ type 2 diabetes, higher premature death rates, more heart disease and stroke,⁶ and probably even depression. When television-watching is added to the time spent on computers and other electronic devices, it isn't surprising that sleep is so neglected. Just think! With some mindful media fasting we might eat less junk, spend more face time with our families, get more sleep, and have more energy and time to go outside and play!

Watch out for “sleeping pills”

These include common prescription medications – *zolpidem*, *alprazolam*, *lorazepam*, and *clonazepam*, as well as the sedative antihistamine *diphenhydramine*, often found in over-the-counter sleeping aids. For over 30 years some studies have linked many of these drugs with increased risk of death.⁷ As these studies are observational, an accurate cause-and-effect association can't be determined, but it is cause for concern. Investigate and pursue every lifestyle choice and bedtime

¹ Grontved, A. and Hu, F. JAMA 2011;305:2448-55

² Otten, J.J. et al. Arch Intern Med 2009;169:2109-15

³ Stamatakis, E. et al. J Am Coll Cardiol 2011;57:292-9

⁴ Gopinath, B. et al. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 2011;31:1233-9

⁵ Thorp, A. et al. Diabetes Care 2010;33:327-34

⁶ Grontved, A. and Hu, F. JAMA 2011;305:2448-55

⁷ Kao, C.H. et al. Mayo Clin Proc 2012;87:430-6

strategy you can find that may help you sleep drug-free as much as possible.

- In one study⁸ 10,529 people who used hypnotics (sleeping pills) were compared to 23,676 matched control. They were followed for an average of 2.5 years and substantially higher death rates were found even in people who used sleeping pills only 18 times per year.
- The day after taking a sleeping pill, many people have significantly impaired skills in activities such as driving.⁹ The risk is likely greater for those over 60 years old.¹⁰

The bottom line?

Putting the effort into finding your drug-free solution for a good night's sleep is worth it.

Do you have sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea and other disorders of sleep can be treated to improve sleep. Although sleep apnea is more common in people who are overweight, it can be a problem in anyone. If you have chronic sleep problems, it may be worth talking to your doctor about whether you should be investigated for sleep apnea.

Suggestions for a better sleep

As well as these tips, there are other behavioral techniques and medications that may help. Your doctor can point you in the right direction.

1. Develop a consistent routine with regular sleep and wake times to allow 7–9 hours of sleep, including weekends.
2. As a general rule, avoid daytime naps – although an occasional nap can supplement an inadequate night's sleep.
3. Avoid afternoon or evening caffeine.
4. Check all prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and supplements to see if they can be blamed for your insomnia.
5. Try to resolve problems before bedtime. Lack of sleep will only intensify stress.

⁸ Kripke, D.F. et al. BMJ Open 2012;2:e000850

⁹ Kuehn, B.M. JAMA 2013;309:645-6

¹⁰ Glass, J. et al. BMJ 2005;331:1169

6. Keep your bedroom as cool as possible.
7. A hot mug of a caffeine-free herbal tea with a teaspoon of honey may help. (Chamomile is a traditional soother.)
8. Avoid tobacco – it’s a stimulant.
9. Get daily exercise, preferably in the first half of the day. (Exercising close to bedtime can make sleeping more difficult.)
10. If you can’t sleep, do quiet activities such as reading, or listening to relaxing music.
11. Remove television and other electronic devices from the bedroom, and keep it as dark as possible – no night lights, and curtains closed. Even a digital clock display can disrupt sleep.
12. Take a deep hot bath for 20–30 minutes in the late evening. A few drops of lavender oil in the bath can be helpful.
13. Keep alcohol intake to one drink per day – it acts as both stimulant and depressant, with an unpredictable effect on sleep.
14. Focus on relaxing your whole body, one muscle group at a time, from toes to head.
15. Avoid large meals within three hours of bedtime – but a bedtime snack that combines protein, fat, and calcium may help. For example, an apple with a slice of sharp cheddar cheese, or plain whole milk yogurt sweetened with a bit of honey with a side of raw almonds.
16. Talk to your doctor about treating symptoms that interfere with sleep, such as chronic pain or frequent urination.
17. If all else fails, read the list of health risks associated with inadequate sleep on the first page – you might just scare yourself to sleep!

Supplements for better sleep

There are supplements that occasionally help sleep, and those we try most commonly are:

- Standardized valerian extract
- Mix of valerian, hops and passion flower
- *Calms Forté*, a homeopathic preparation
- Melatonin (particularly for those over 60)

Light therapy for better sleep

- Dawn simulator alarm clocks use light instead of sound to trigger our wake-up cycle, gradually increasing the light in the room and allowing our bodies to wake up naturally. Dawn simulation has been found to help with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), and those who find it hard to wake up in the morning.
- Exposure to bright light when you wake up can be effective sleep therapy. Depending on the time of year, this can be achieved with exposure to outside light first thing in the morning or by sitting in front of a 10,000 lux light for 20–40 minutes on awakening. Some people benefit from similar treatment in the late afternoon. (You can experiment for yourself or work with a sleep specialist.) This is the same kind of light used to treat SAD. There are a number of sources of these special lights, including bio-light.com.

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Dr. Hassell established the [Integrative Medicine Program](#) at Providence Cancer Center in Portland and is a clinical instructor in the training of Internal Medicine residents, twice named *Outstanding Teacher of the Year*. He also lectures widely to physician groups about the appropriate integration of lifestyle and conventional medicine, and is often interviewed on health issues by local television and radio. He is the co-author of *Good Food, Great Medicine*, an evidence-based guide to using a whole food Mediterranean diet in the pursuit of optimal health.

In his private practice Dr. Hassell encourages the vigorous use of evidence-based food and lifestyle choices and has been chosen as one of *Portland's Top Doctors*. Dr. Hassell is available for individual consultations for diagnosis, second opinion, or to develop patient-centered solutions using evidence-based conventional and lifestyle interventions.

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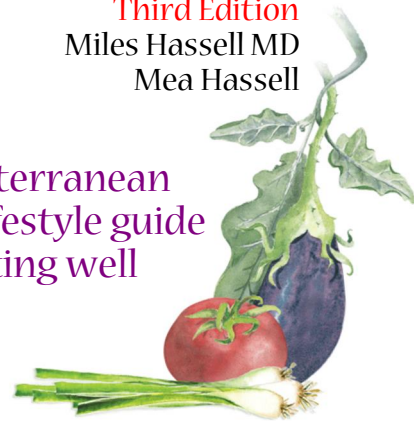
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Good Food Great Medicine

Third Edition
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a Mediterranean
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