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Vergie Charlery's Self Care e-Book #1

Sleep

Table of Contents

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Sleep

We spend nearly one-third of our lives sleeping. Sleep is one of the most critical factors in being healthy, and not getting enough shut-eye time can significantly impact our well-being. Nevertheless, many of us often ignore our need for sleep and treat it as a nuisance or a waste of time.

Sleep is essential for our bodies to rest, especially when it comes to our brains. Without sleep, you are more likely to feel sluggish. Moreover, if you don't get adequate sleep, your nervous system can't recharge, reducing your productivity and enhancing your stress responses (Wright Jr. et al., 2015). In addition, sleep deprivation may lead to memory problems and impair our ability to learn new things (Manchanda et al., 2018).

Try these tips to get restful sleep.

● **Eliminate distractions as much as possible.** We can't eliminate all noises, lights, or other distractions, especially if we live in a crowded environment. Yet, you might still improve your sleep by eliminating as many distractions as possible.

● **Limit caffeine.** Caffeine is a stimulant and may give you a boost of energy during the day. However, if consumed close to bedtime, caffeine can reduce the quality of your sleep. It may be best to limit your caffeine intake to earlier hours of the day.

● **Create a restful environment.** You might want to adjust your pillows to your liking and change your bed sheets regularly. It is also essential to set the temperature to a comfortable range so that you don't awaken drenched in sweat or your teeth chattering.

● **Avoid eating heavy meals close to bedtime.** Feeling too full can make you feel uncomfortable and give you heartburn, which may disrupt your sleep.

● **Silence your phone.** If you keep your cell phone nearby while you sleep, you might want to keep it silenced until you are ready to wake up. If you are uncomfortable with that, you might want to limit your notifications, such as for certain types of calls or emails. Your sleep doesn't have to suffer from each buzz or chime when a marketing email reaches your inbox.

● **Limit screen time before bedtime.** Our cell phones and other portable devices emit blue light, which may delay your falling asleep.

● **Relax.** Many people carry all their stress and worries to bed, which may keep them awake. Try relaxation methods before sleep, such as meditation or Yoga Nidra. You might also read before bed but make sure you use a physical book or a device that allows you to adjust its light setting to avoid blue light exposure.

Exercise: Sleep Evaluation

Do you get enough sleep? Do you wake up energized? This exercise will help you take a closer look at your sleep pattern. Answer the following questions for the next few days upon waking up.

1. **How long did you sleep?**

2. **How did you wake up? (Alarm, on your own, etc.)**

3. **Did you wake up energized or feel like you need more sleep?**

4. **Did you wake up with your body relaxed or have any aches or stiffness?**

5. **Did you wake up comfortably, or were you sweaty or feeling cold?**

6. **Do you remember any awake periods? What woke you up, and how long did it take to fall back asleep?**

7. **If you remember your dreams, were they pleasant, happy, stressful, scary, strange, etc.?**

Take home:

Thinking about your sleep can help you identify any changes you need. For instance, if you wake up and feel like you need a bit more sleep, you might want to go to bed earlier. If you wake up with a stiff back, you might want to consider investing in a more comfortable mattress. Similarly, if you wake up sweaty most days, you might want to adjust the temperature or use a lighter blanket. Reevaluate your sleep after making changes to your sleep habits to see whether these changes were effective. If they were not, consider a consultation with a sleep specialist.

Taking Breaks and Resting

Sleep is essential to stay healthy, but our bodies and minds need additional periods of rest to recharge. Whether we are busy with our jobs, family responsibilities, or other demands of our time and attention, we may be tempted to keep doing what we're doing without a pause. Nevertheless, taking a break from our tasks can help us finish our tasks with less strain and provide many other benefits.

No matter how much you enjoy a task, doing it continuously will increase stress responses in your body or mind. Suppose a friend of yours loves playing video games. If they stay glued to their game console or computer for an entire day, they will feel their necks become gradually stiff, their backs achy, and their wrists and fingers throbbing with pain, which are the signs that your friend's body is experiencing stress. Similarly, focusing on a task for prolonged periods could create a mental strain, causing us to struggle to pay attention.

Prolonged stress can be detrimental to your physical and mental health (Chu et al., 2021). Taking breaks during the day allows your body and mind to rest and recover from stress. A rest period can even increase your creativity and productivity (Pang, 2016).

Here are a few suggestions to help you maximize the benefits of your breaks.

1. Switch.

Choose an activity that will engage body parts or mental skills that are different from those used by what you are working on. Remember, the idea is to rest parts that are getting tired. If you've been sitting and staring at a computer screen, you might want to stand up, stretch your legs, and take a short walk. If you've been doing physical labour, you might want to sit or lie down to rest. Ideally, what you do in your break with your body complements what you were doing before the break.

2. Unplug.

If you take a break from a work assignment but read and answer work emails, are you really taking a break? Resist the urge to see the notification on your screen or check your emails.

3. Enjoy.

Choose activities that will help you relieve stress but also give you joy. If you are a bookworm, reading during your break might make you feel refreshed. But if you don't enjoy reading, spending your break with a book might bore you out of your mind. Consider your likes and dislikes before you commit to a break activity, and if you realize that you don't feel like doing something you've started, it is okay to switch to something more fun or fulfilling.

Another thing to keep in mind is that breaks are supposed to relieve stress and help you rest. If you feel too busy to take a break and have a long to-do list, forcing yourself to stop working might backfire and increase your stress levels. If that's the case, take a break from your primary task by switching to a different task. That way, you'll feel relieved that something else on your to-do list is getting done, and you'll still get some rest by engaging your mind in another task.

Exercise: Planning Your Break

Most people don't plan their breaks. However, if we don't think about what we want to do ahead of time, we might miss the opportunity to relax and recharge fully. Complete the sentences below to get started.

Today, I need to take a break from_____(task or activity).

My break will last for_____(duration).

During my break, I will_____(activity).

I chose this activity because it will help me _____(purpose).

Take home:

Planning your break ahead of time can help you get the most out of your time and also give you something to look forward to.