



How to Get a Good Night's Sleep

by Rose Kumar M.D.

Sleep is essential for health. The lack of sleep stresses the adrenals and reduces vitality. It causes an acceleration of the aging process. The three most powerful ways to promote health and slow down aging are:

1. A plant based wholesome diet rich in antioxidants
2. 6 – 8 hours of sleep per night
3. Regular aerobic exercise (at least 20 minutes 5 to 6 times per week)

The lack of sleep has become a chronic problem of our time. Studies show that 6-8 hours of sleep per night are needed to produce enough melatonin and maintain neurotransmitters for optimal health. Hormonal changes in midlife women, particularly a reduction in progesterone, can disrupt the sleep cycle. The stress of our fast paced life and constant busyness, coupled with fast food, brain stimulation by computers/texting/ television, all contribute to insomnia and disturbed sleep. The brain has a hard time shutting off and resting at the end of the day with all the over-stimulation it experiences. The brain needs energy to function and needs to replenish its circuits before another day of activity begins. Deep breathing and meditation help immensely, but most people do not take the time to do this. Doing 10 minutes of abdominal breathing every night, or alternate nostril breathing (Pranayama), relaxes the brain enough to allow for its rest and rejuvenation.

The regular intake of alcohol, inflammatory fast foods (nutrient poor), caffeine, and television or computer use (the glare from the screens has deleterious effects on brain activity before bed) have an additive effect in overstimulating the brain. I advise my patients who have difficulty sleeping to eliminate or minimize alcohol and wheat, increase their intake of whole, plant based and omega-3 foods, and add daily exercise. With these changes, the vast majority begin sleeping better

Supplements that support health sleep:

1. Magnesium 250 mg before bed.
2. Lavender oil pills, Lavela, which have shown similar efficacy as prescription sleep aids (manufactured by Integrative Therapeutics, available locally for purchase at The Ommani Center).
3. Melatonin 5mg. No more than 5mg should be used as a sleep aid, only on an as-needed basis as melatonin is a hormone. Any hormone taken by mouth regularly will suppress the production of the body's natural hormone production. It has been shown to help people that work night shift as melatonin production is reduced when we lose the darkness of night hours (even a night light in the bedroom will reduce the brains production of melatonin). A decrease in melatonin production by the body has been correlated with increase in the incidence of cancer. The data on melatonin supplementation is mixed and this should not be taken on a long term basis as a sleep aid until conclusive evidence demonstrates its safety.
4. Valerian is an herb that is commonly used for insomnia. The data on its effectiveness and my experience of it with my patients remains mixed.
5. Omega-3 Fish oil. Omega 3 and the amino acid tryptophan together increase serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a precursor to melatonin which aids in sleep. Salmon, sardines, oily cold water fish, and eggs all increase serotonin in the brain. Make sure your omega-3 supplement is of pharmaceutical grade, mercury free, micro-distilled, and supplies at least 300 mg of DHA and 300 mg of EPA per capsule. 2 to 3 capsules per day are needed for a therapeutic effect.
6. Bio-identical progesterone is extremely effective to restore sleep in midlife women whose hormones are out of balance. This must be done with the aid of a physician skilled in hormone balancing, who also monitors blood levels of hormones to ensure safety.

Foods:

Bananas, almonds, warm milk, cherries, decaf green tea, oatmeal, salmon, cold water fish, and eggs are all recommended to enhance sleep.

I always tell my patients to try eliminating the unhealthy foods and behaviors they are engaged in for a few weeks and then resume them. See what happens. Experimenting in this way releases the pressure that they may feel of 'being deprived.' Instead, they approach this experiment with curiosity and take cues from their body instead of my directive. The majority of patients who have approached it in this way have successfully resumed a healthy sleep pattern.

Complementary Medicine:

1. Acupuncture is a very successful modality in restoring sleep patterns.

2. Massage relaxes the muscles and produces serotonin in the brain and body.

It takes time to develop an unhealthy sleep pattern – so, it takes some time to develop a healthy one. Food takes time to restructure the cells and re-calibrate the good chemicals in the brain and body that promote health.

Food is Medicine. It is not a quick fix. It is, however, a lasting one. Supplements are just that – *supplements* to our diet and lifestyle, not substitutes for healthy food and exercise.

Nature has everything within it we need to support our health. If we live a balanced life from its basic principles, we can minimize disease and maximize our body's regenerative potential. The good news is that we always have a choice to do this. It's fun to try healthy behaviors and see how our body responds. This is the basic premise of any scientific study. We can do our own study and learn from our own body's wisdom at any time.

The choice is always ours.

DR. KUMAR ACCEPTS MOST INSURANCES AND IS CURRENTLY ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS.

Call 262.695.5311 to schedule an appointment.

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