

Bed-Time Wind-Down: 10 Tips to better Zzzs

Huffington Post: January 22, 2014

By: Jonathan Alpert

There's no doubt that sleep issues contribute to both mental and physical health problems and also to societal stress. For proof, look no farther than the Metro North train accident on Dec. 1, 2013. Reportedly, the train's engineer fell asleep at the controls as the train approached a curve. Also linked to sleep problems are heart disease, hypertension, stroke, and obesity, according to the CDC. **The good news is that so much of improving sleep has to do with lifestyle and things that you can actually control.** Rather than convincing yourself that you're a bad sleeper, take a look below and implement some of these suggestions:



- **Go to sleep only when you're tired.** The big mistake people so often make is they go to sleep before they are ready, and this is what leads to a cycle of not sleeping and worry about being up.
- **Change the way you think about sleep.** So often poor sleepers attribute every problem they have to the sleep issues. Change the negative thinking that might be associated with sleep. Know that some problems can be attributed to sleep while others have nothing to do with it.
- **Try relaxation exercises such as guided imagery, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation.** These have helped many of my patients to calm their minds and bodies.
- **Turn your alarm clock away from your view.** Have confidence that it will sound when it is supposed to. Looking at the time only increases anxiety about going to sleep and getting enough of it.



- **Be active during the day.** Doing so increases your drive for sleep. Including some form of aerobic activity will help with this too, but not too close to bed time.
- **Avoid caffeine (teas, coffee, chocolate) and spicy foods at least six hours before bedtime.** Both stimulate the body. Don't drink alcohol close to bedtime. Contrary to what many think, it won't make you sleep like a baby. It may knock you out initially, but within a few hours as the body starts to eliminate the alcohol, it will wake you or at best, cause a restless sleep.
- **Make your sleep environment comfortable.** We spend on average 24 years of our life sleeping. Make sure the bed is the right size and firmness, the temperature is right, and the room is your preferred darkness. Many of my patients use a white noise machine to create an ambient sound that blocks out street distractions.
- **Shut off electronic equipment an hour before bed, including computers, phones, and televisions.** Light is incompatible with sleep and might trick the brain into staying awake when you should be sleeping. Also, the stimulation from these devices is counter to what you're trying to achieve. And by all means, do not sleep with your cell phone by your head. Unconsciously your brain may not allow itself to get into too deep of a sleep knowing a call/text might come through just inches away.
- **Turn off the mind chatter.** A few hours before bedtime write out all the things on your mind that need to be dealt with, and place it with your keys for the next day. Out of mind will help eliminate the chronic worry that so often keeps people up at night.
- **Use your bed for sleep and sex only.** Don't eat or work or watch TV in it. Maintain a separation between bed activities and awake activities.

Lorie Eber is a NASM Certified Personal Trainer, Gerontologist and author. Lorie Eber Wellness Coaching provides one-on-one guidance and support to clients who are ready to make permanent lifestyle changes and lead a happier, healthier life.

If you're interested in learning more about the program, email Ms. Eber at EberLorie@gmail.com, call her at (714) 357-9946, or visit her website: www.AgingBeatstheAlternative.com.