10 Steps to Great Sleep

So we know that sleeping 7 or more hours per night is good, and that there are serious health and physique consequences when you don't get enough.

But it's one thing to know this; and it's quite another to take action.

So how do you actually get more high-quality sleep? One way is to develop good sleep habits, which will help us get a good night's rest almost every night.

You can't control your sleep outcome, whether you will get a perfect sleep tonight.

But you can take charge of your sleep routine and control your sleep behaviors, which dramatically improve your chances of good, restful ZZZs.

Have a Sleep Plan

Just like you can't go from 0 to 100 in the morning, you can't instantly calm down from a busy day the moment your head hits the pillow. A sleep ritual creates a transition period during which you tell your brain to start relaxing.

Decide on a bedtime in advance, and start planning for it 1-2 hours ahead.

10 Habits for Restful Sleep

1. Limit your caffeine to the morning with no caffeinated drinks after 2PM.

Caffeine is a stimulant that stays in your body for 6-8 hours after ingesting it. So if you're fairly sensitive to coffee or energy drinks, decrease your caffeine intake (have one cup of coffee instead of two) or at least cut it off by mid-afternoon. Remember that this includes coffee, black and green tea, soda, energy drinks, and dark chocolate.

2. 1 to 2 hours before bed, take out a piece of paper and do a "brain dump."

If it's ever taken you an hour or more to get to sleep, you've experienced the dreaded "mind crazies". Whether we're planning our next day, going over stuff that happened earlier, or just thinking about nothing in particular, it's easy to get lost in our heads as we lie down in bed.

A brain dump is exactly what it sounds like: getting thoughts out of your head and onto paper. So plan your next day, make a note to call your friend back, and remind yourself of the meeting next Tuesday. Also write down anything else that's on your mind, especially anything you're worried about.

Write it all down, clear your mind, and get in bed. The paper will still be there in the morning ready for your full attention. But your brain will be clear and clean, ready for sleep.

3. Turn off your TV and computer an hour before bed.

A lot of people like to drift off while watching David Letterman or YouTube videos.

While it may seem like a relaxing activity, watching TV or playing on the computer are actually *stimulatory* experiences, they're engaging your brain and emotions even if you don't consciously realize it. Plus, the light from screens can mess up our circadian clocks. This leads to trouble falling asleep or frequent bouts of waking up and drifting off again throughout the night.

4. Make yourself some decaf tea, listen to soft music, and read something light.

Most people haven't read a book since high school or college. Drink tea? Listen to relaxing music while calming down?

Reading light fiction while sipping on hot herbal tea gets you out of your mind and into a story. It regulates your breathing and signals to your body that you're "shutting down" for the evening.

Most of us have a hard time de-stressing from a long day. Having small, relaxing activities can help calm us down and prepare our bodies for sleep.

5. Turn off all phones and gadgets and put them in another room.

New research suggests that eliminating radio frequency (RF) sources, like the ones found in cell phones, will enable your body to "shut down" more efficiently. These RF signals may interfere with your body's immune systems and have a negative impact on sleep quality and general health.

Your best bet is to leave your cell phone and charging stations in another room. And if you use your cell as an alarm clock, you may want to consider buying a battery-operated clock instead.

Besides, you don't want to hear text message pings while you're trying to sleep, they're much too tempting to check.

6. Set your bedroom temperature to 67-70F.
While the exact temperature is different for everyone, a slightly "colder" room is important for helping you fall asleep.

This means that when we slide into our sheets at night, we're chilly for the first few minutes. However, we make up for those five minutes of discomfort by falling asleep quickly and getting an incredible night's sleep.

7. Take (an Epsom salts) bath before bed.
Taking a bath before bed is another way to relax and prepare your body for sleep, especially if you include 1-2 cups of magnesium-based Epsom salts.

Magnesium is an important mineral involved in promoting sleep. And, as it can be absorbed through the skin during baths, Epsom salts are great for sleep. (Some) Athletes also swear by this for recovery.

8. Experiment with a small pre-bed meal.
Going to bed while physically hungry will make it harder to go to sleep since your body will be in "food-seeking mode." Also, one of the culprits for groggy mornings is low blood sugar. To combat low blood sugar, try eating something light with a little bit of high-quality fat. One of my favorites is celery sticks with half a tablespoon of natural peanut butter.

9. Dim the lights. Darken your bedroom.
Darkness signals to our body that it's time for sleep. Dim the lights an hour or two before bed, only as bright as they need to be to keep you from bumping into things. And make your bedroom as dark and quiet as possible: Get good drapes or blinds, block out ambient light, and cover any light sources (e.g. electronic displays).

10. Try some white noise.
If you're bothered by outside noise, try leaving a fan or humidifier on in your bedroom. This will create a "white noise" or steady hum that will drown or level out out distracting sounds.

Develop Your Own Sleep Ritual
You don't have to try all of these strategies tonight, but I do want you to pick two or three that work for you and try them out. Think of it as you own personal sleep experiment. And, at the end of the experiment, you'll have a fool-proof sleep ritual.