

Sleep: 12 tips to get a better night's rest



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One of the most important parts of wellness can be accomplished by doing nothing.

That's right – nothing.

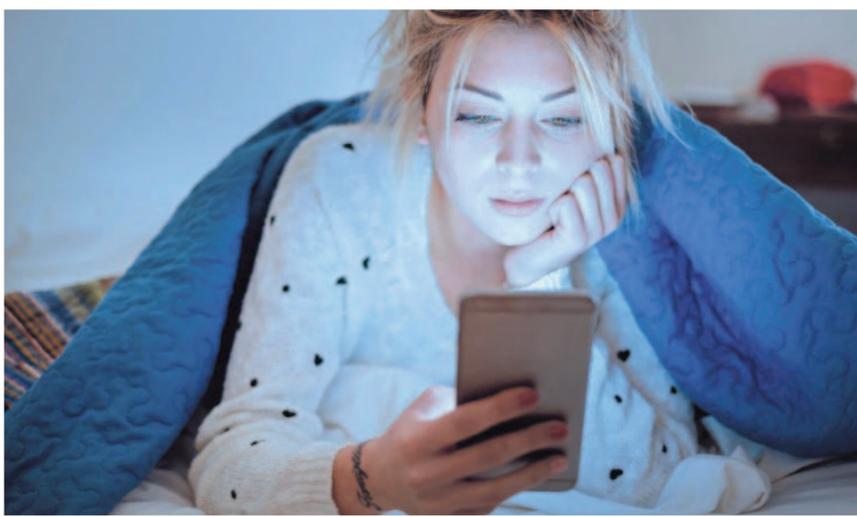
Sleep often is overlooked as an essential ingredient in your overall health. Research studies connect a good night's sleep to improved productivity, memory, concentration, immune system function and creativity, and it helps manage your appetite. Conversely, those who don't get enough sleep have higher rates of obesity, heart disease and stroke, as well as an increased risk for diabetes and depression.

The lack of sleep is such a grave concern that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared sleep disorders a public health epidemic.

Two other ingredients to improved health – eating properly and regular exercise – require a great deal of commitment. So does sleep, and that should be easy. So why aren't we all getting eight hours of sleep per night, like our mothers taught us when we were young? Because we're not making sleep a priority. In its 2018 Sleep in America poll, the National Sleep Foundation asked respondents to rank their priorities: fitness and nutrition were No. 1, work was No. 2, hobbies and interests was No. 3 and sleep came in at fourth. Just 10 percent of respondents make sleep a priority in their lives.

"The data are clear: Good sleepers realize the benefits of a good night's sleep and see themselves as more effective at getting things done the following day," said Dr. Maurice Ohayon, director of the Stanford Sleep Epidemiology Research Center. "It's therefore disappointing to see so few people actually prioritizing their sleep."

Failing to prioritize sleep can have serious consequences on your health. In August, a team of global researchers presented findings at the European Society of Cardiology Congress that pegged the ideal amount of nightly sleep at six to



Don't use your cell phone or tablet right before bedtime. Electronics emit a type of blue light that can prevent the brain from making melatonin, which helps regulate your sleep cycle. Power off all electronic devices at least 30 minutes before you're ready to go to sleep and grab some light reading material.

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eight hours. Greek physician Dr. Epameinondas Fountas noted: "Our findings suggest that too much or too little sleep may be bad for the heart. More research is needed to clarify exactly why, but we do know that sleep influences biological processes like glucose metabolism, blood pressure and inflammation – all of which have an impact on cardiovascular disease."

Many of my new patients admit they've overlooked the importance of sleep. To optimize your sleep and help your body recover, keep these 12 tips in mind:

■ **Exercise:** Moderate to vigorous exercise daily is recommended. Be cautious not to exercise right before bedtime, though. Your body needs time to wind down before falling asleep.

■ **Dinner:** Your last meal of the day shouldn't be your largest. For many patients, I recommend the Ketoflex 12/3 diet, which involves components of a Mediterranean plant-focused, high-fiber diet. The 12/3 number comes into play by having individuals consume all of their food each day within a 12-hour period,

thus allowing a 12-hour fast, and a guideline to stop eating at least three hours before bedtime.

■ **Electronic devices:** Don't watch TV right before bedtime, and definitely don't use your cell phone or tablet. Electronics emit a type of blue light that can prevent the brain from making melatonin, which helps regulate your sleep cycle. Power off all electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime and grab some light reading material.

■ **Bedtime:** Our bodies need a consistent sleep pattern. Going to bed at same time and waking up at the same time, even on the weekends, helps establish a routine.

■ **Caffeine:** Coffee, black tea and soda, and even chocolate candy, are used as pick-me-ups, but the effects of caffeine can linger hours after you're ready to call it a day. Studies show coffee can slow the progress of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, and stave off dementia, so one cup of java in the morning is OK.

■ **Naps:** A post-work nap might sound enticing, but even a half-hour power nap can adversely impact your sleep cycle.

■ **Sleep medication:** Over-the-counter medication might help you fall asleep quicker, and even stay asleep, but it's only a temporary fix and not a long-term solution.

■ **Set the mood:** A dark bedroom with blackout shades helps the body create melatonin, and a quiet bedroom allows the body to begin winding down and preparing itself for sleep.

■ **Bedding:** A mattress that's too firm or soft for your liking won't improve your sleep pattern. Also, choose a comfortable pillow.

■ **No-nos:** Smoking has been proven to cause obstructive sleep apnea, and alcohol consumption might help you fall asleep, but won't necessarily keep you asleep for the whole night or help your brain detoxify overnight.

■ **Temperature:** The National Sleep Foundation pegs the optimum bedroom temperature at 65 degrees. It might be difficult to attain that temperature in Florida, but a ceiling fan can help keep your body cooler at night. Experiment with the thermostat until you find the perfect temperature.

■ **Bladder control:** Enjoying a glass of milk or water before bedtime is a common custom, but that might mean disrupting your deep sleep cycle an hour or two later with a trip to the bathroom.

Few of us can say we truly get enough sleep each night. We wake up groggy, chug caffeinated beverages to stay alert at the office and battle exhaustion in the late afternoon.

Yet, we'll stay awake to watch late night talk shows or catch the final play of a game, or scroll through our social media pages so we don't miss the latest news or gossip.

Put down the remote, put away the phone and go to bed. Your brain and your body will thank you in the morning.

Pamela Hughes, DO, the founder of Hughes Center for Functional Medicine, located at 800 Goodlette Road N., in Naples, provides patients with modern modalities and evidence-based, leading-edge functional and integrative medicine. For more information, call 239-649-7400 or visit HughesCenterNaples.com.

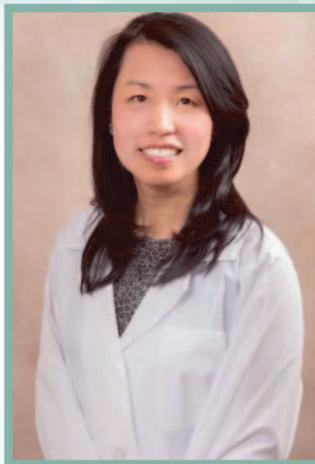
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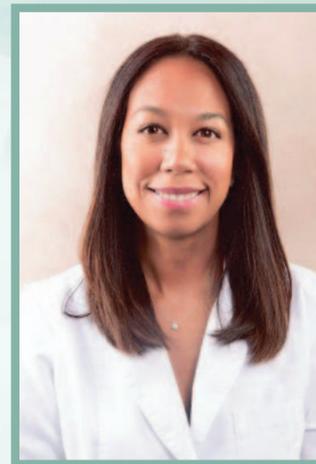
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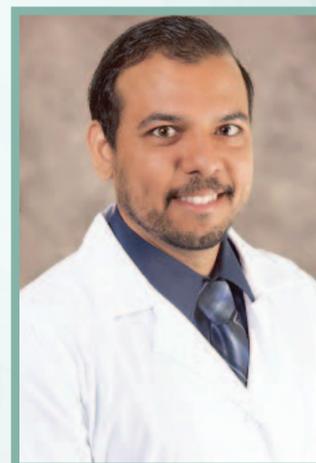
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