

## Tired of Being Tired – Tips to Improving Sleep

*Shakespeare wrote "Gentle sleep is nature's soft nurse"*

Many of us may not get enough sleep or have poor sleep, so that we have become sleep deprived.

Sleep deprivation can lead to daytime drowsiness and tiredness. It can depress the immune system, increase irritability, and slow reaction time, increasing the likelihood of car crashes and other accidents. Even worse, **losing sleep may actually accelerate the ageing process**. The message is clear: You need to get enough good quality sleep. For most of us, this means about 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.



Sleep is healing, not only because it permits the body to physically rest, and restore muscles and body tissues, but also because it allows the mind to reorganize and digest our experiences and circumstances for understanding our situation and planning future action.

Sleep is determined by a number of factors:

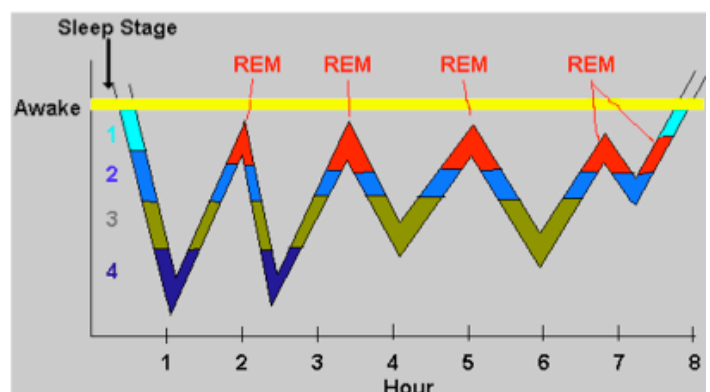
- **Our Biological Sleep Clock** – This is our 24 hour rhythm, which is determined by sunlight and darkness. Sunlight activates brain centres responsible for “awakeness” to turn on, while darkness activates the hormone Melatonin to turn the wake centres off.
- **Sleep Wake Metre** – Simply being awake for some time, increases the need for sleep – causing sleepiness. Sleepiness is caused by increased levels of Adenosine in the brain, causing the brain cells to slow down. Interestingly, Caffeine blocks Adenosine receptors in the brain, blocking the feeling of sleepiness.
- **Body Temperature** – Body core temperature varies over the day – being highest in the evening, and lowest in the early morning. If body core temperature doesn't fall during sleep time, then sleep is difficult.

During Sleep your brain, eyes and muscles go through various cycles. (see graph below) You are not still during sleep, except in REM sleep (see below). Moving in sleep, helps to relieve body pressure.

There are 4 stages of Non REM Sleep. The deepest stage is where energy is restored & growth hormone for repair released.

REM (Rapid Eye Movement) Stage aids learning & memory, and the body becomes paralysed. This is when dreams occur.

During the night, one cycles through these phases of Non REM & REM sleep a number of times.





## TIPS for Improving Sleep

*"The body responds to gentleness"*

Many things can interfere with the sleep pattern; once this happens then good quality sleep can be lost.

- **Avoid caffeine** (e.g. coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate) close to bedtime. It can keep you awake.
- **Avoid using alcohol** to aid sleep or too close to bedtime. It may help you to go to sleep, but you will sleep poorly and feel un-rested in the morning.
- It may help to establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as a warm shower, then reading a book or listening to soothing music. Maintain a **regular** "going to bed" and wake up time schedule, including on weekends.
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable & cool. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows. Use your bedroom only for **sleep and sex**.
- Try getting enough sleep for your needs – 6 to 9 hours – so you don't feel sleep deprived. *If during your yoga RELAXATION you frequently fall asleep, then you are probably sleep deprived.*

### **A yoga sleep routine would include:**

*Drink a glass of warm milk flavoured with a cardamom pod and a scant 1/8 teaspoon tumeric. Massage the feet with your favourite oil/cream, then wipe the feet with a damp cloth. Lie down on your back, take 10 long slow quiet breaths. Then turn onto your left side and take 10 long slow breaths. Then lie down on your back and take 10 long slow breaths. Then turn onto your right side and take 10 long slow breaths. Then again lie on your back and take 10 long slow breaths. Hopefully you would have fallen asleep by now!*

- One of the commonest problems with sleep is trying "too hard". Going to sleep just happens, you can't make it happen. So when going to sleep take the attitude "I'm going to rest now, " then lie down when sleepy, let go, and **allow sleep to come**. If it doesn't, get up until you feel sleepy, then try again.

**Stress** is another big culprit hindering sleep.

- Being physically **active** during the day & getting regular exercise may aid improved sleep. An active yoga routine during the day might be the answer. **Regular asana practice** can release the tension. Try winding down with calming poses such as forward bends, twists, simple inversions (such as lying with your feet up the wall or supported Down Dog), and gentle breathing.
- Try **long slow abdominal breathing** - Lie on your back with your eyes closed, gently place your hands on your belly. Inhale and feel your belly. As you exhale, allow your belly to release. Stay connected to the breathing until you feel sleepy.
- Practising **relaxation** during the day for 10 to 20 minutes, may also help reduce tension, and aid sleep.
- I find for myself, **meditating** before bed, one of the best aids to having a great sleep. Choose your favourite Meditation technique and practise for 10 to 15 minutes before bed. Let all your worries and stresses go. Learn to become still, and just be, rather than always doing something.
- If your mind won't stop – **write down your thoughts**, then put them aside. Put your mind onto something restful, or meditate, until you feel sleepy.