

A Long Winter's Nap Tonya Judd, M.H.

The holidays are upon us and with it comes a plethora of “to-do’s.” There is one activity that should be at the top of our to-do lists this season (and every season) and that is getting adequate sleep. We often times are under the false belief that the less we sleep and the more we accomplish the more successful we will be. This false belief weighs in at a heavy price and that price is that of our mental and physical health and well-being. We treat sleep like it’s an optional activity. We have come to believe that sleeping less qualifies us for a medal in the race to see how much we can accomplish each day in this world of work demands and hectic schedules.

However, in reality if we were to get more sleep then we would be able to better accomplish the tasks on our to-do lists and do so more efficiently and with mental clarity. With this being said, I do realize that there are those individuals who suffer from insomnia and other sleep disorders who would love to sleep. I will address some suggestions for this as well.



Sleeping restores the chemicals in the brain. Cerebral Spinal Fluid floods the brain while we sleep to cleanse the vessels in

the brain and remove waste that needs to be eliminated from the brain. One fifth of the body’s circulatory blood is channeled to your brain while you are sleeping. Sleep balances and regulates your body’s vital systems and is a major factor contributing to memory consolidation. Adequate sleep improves memory, keeps the nervous system clean, clears toxic memories from the brain and reduces stress.

Are you having trouble focusing, remembering or retaining information? “One 24 hour stint without sleeping or 1 week of sleeping 5 hours or less each night induces an impairment equivalent to a blood-alcohol level of .1%.” (Charles Czeisler). We all need to be functioning at an optimal level and if we are not getting enough sleep it can be as though we are intoxicated, which often results in being over-reactive to emotional stimuli, impairs our ability to focus, remember and retain information. Lack of sleep also alters our decision making and problem solving abilities and makes it more difficult for us to wisely manage our time.

If you are having trouble losing weight try getting more sleep. Weight gain and Type 2 Diabetes have been linked to sleep deprivation. When the body is lacking in sleep the brain throws glucose into the system. Loss of sleep increases the body’s production of Ghrelin-which stimulates hunger while also decreasing the levels of Leptin- which signals the brain when your body doesn’t require any more food. Sleep is also essential for building muscle and studies show that lack of sleep greatly contributes to muscle atrophy.

If you have noticed that your skin is more wrinkled in appearance than normal it may be caused from a lack of sleep. The lack of sleep upsets your hormonal balance and elevates circulating estrogen levels, thus decreasing collagen.

While diet and exercise play an enormous role in a healthy immune system, sleep plays an equally important role. Sleep deprivation decreases the production of protective cytokines and infection fighting antibodies that regulate our immune systems. Lack of sleep is directly linked to depressed immune function. Inadequate sleep can increase your susceptibility to become sick by 40%. Dr. Nathaniel F. Watson, president of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, sums it up wonderfully: "People need to view sleep as a tool to achieve a healthy life, rather than as something that interferes with all their other activities."

Many of us have trained our bodies to live on less sleep than we realistically need and in order to get the adequate sleep needed to function at an optimal level we may need to re-train our bodies to sleep. I am not suggesting you sleep all day, but do strive to get more sleep.

If you don't get enough sleep because you simply have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, try a few of the following suggestions:

- Stop drinking coffee, soda and any caffeinated drinks.

- Clean up your diet and drink plenty of pure water.

- Exercise daily.

- Try some yoga for relaxation.

- Turn off your computer, laptop and any electronic device at least an hour prior to bedtime.

- Try some deep breathing exercises.

- Dr. Christopher's Relax-eze, Dr. Christopher's Sleep Well Spray, Dr. Christopher's Slumber capsules or Dr. Christopher's Mind-trac.

- Lavender oil rubbed on the feet.

- Chamomile tea.

- Walking barefoot in the grass or sand.

"Allow your mind and body to rest and rebuild this holiday season and in so doing you will see your mental and physical health improve. Sleep is a critical function, not just something we do when all the work is done."

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