

## Sleep: A Mystical and Powerful Nutrient

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### Sleep as a Critical Nutrient

Nutrients are things that we need to survive. While we usually think of food, water, and air (and shelter), a critical nutrient is sleep.

Recent research on sleep has demonstrated that we need, on average, eight to nine hours of quality sleep. Poor quantity or quality of sleep cause deterioration of health and performance as evidenced by the following:

- o tendency toward obesity
- o tendency toward insulin resistance and diabetes
- o poor concentration and memory
- o increased rate of car accidents
- o irritability
- o lack of awareness of
- o poor decision making (the accidents at Chernobyl, and Three Mile Island all occurred during the night shift)
- o worsening of pain and inflammation

### What is Sleep?

We spend approximately one-third of our lives sleeping, and yet, scientifically, there is much about sleep that we don't know. We do know that most functions of the body begin to fail with insufficient or improper sleep. The functions that are most directly affected by lack of sleep are perception (including pain), thinking, alertness, energy and immune function.

There are four stages of sleep, Stage I-IV. Through the night, we cycle through these four stages approximately every 3 hours (approximately 45 minutes per phase). As we go through the night, some phases get longer and others get shorter. Dreaming, or Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep occurs during stage II. Stages III and IV are non-dreaming sleep, while Stage IV is called "restorative" sleep. During various portions of the sleep cycle, there are important surges of specific hormones, such as growth hormone. Disruption of normal sleep "architecture" can cause an imbalance of these important hormones.

People with lack of dreaming sleep can develop cognitive or emotional difficulties. People with Stage IV sleep deprivation usually do not feel refreshed in the morning, even if they sleep eight hours or more. Also, a lack of Stage IV sleep seems to "turn up the volume control" on the sense of pain within the nervous system. "Normal" people woken

up each time they go into Stage IV sleep will eventually develop multiple pains.

### Evaluating Sleep

Sleep can be studied by spending a night in a "sleep lab" While sleeping, the sleep patterns are recorded and analyzed. Quantity of stage IV sleep, apnea, oxygenation, and other physiologic parameters are measured. If problems are identified, many can be treated. For the majority of people, a sleep study will not change treatment, so the study is optional. If there is no response to treatment, a sleep study can always be done.

### Treatment of Sleep

To achieve optimum sleep, you must follow all these guidelines:

- 1) Go to sleep and wake up the same time each night, even on weekends.
- 2) Reduce disturbances to sleep (noise, pets, snoring spouse.)
- 3) Your sleep chamber should be pitch dark.
- 4) Minimize naps.
- 5) Avoid foods and medications that interfere with stage II or IV sleep: late meals, alcohol, caffeine, soda, benzodiazepams.
- 6) Don't do any stimulating activities for an hour before bedtime-such as TV, video games, etc. Instead, read, listen to music, take a hot bath...
- 7) Adjust your sleep/wake cycle to clock changes (Daylight Saving Time, trips) at no more than 10-15 minutes per night (i.e. take 4-6 nights to adjust to a 1 hour change)
- 8) Exercise regularly (gentle aerobics works best; but not immediately before bedtime).
- 9) Do not use the same class of sleep inducers (such as Ambien or Restoril) more than 2 times per week (but you can rotate).
- 10) If you wake up, stay in bed. Focus on your breathing or use other relaxation techniques.
- 11) Adjust your sleep-wake cycle to earlier or later in the day (a more natural rhythm for you).

### Use of sleep medications and supplements

Certain medications, especially Flexeril (cyclobenzaprine), tricyclic antidepressants (Elavil, Pamelor, amitriptyline, nortriptyline), Trazadone, and others improve stage IV sleep. Short or long-term use of these medications, at low doses, can

significantly help with sleep and pain. Side effects are usually mild and can include dry mouth and constipation, and rarely difficulty urinating or restlessness.

Other medications, supplements and herbals, such as Benadryl, melatonin, 5HTP, threanine and magnolia can help with various aspects of sleep dysfunction. Usage and dosage varies significantly between individuals.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.**

#### **For More Information**

- O See Dr. Cheikin's website, [www.cheikin.com](http://www.cheikin.com), for related articles on: Energetics (of Compassion), Heavy Metal Toxicity, Journaling, Courage to Heal, as well as other topics and holistic health information.
- O Dr. Cheikin offers workshops in several holistic health topics for adults and children. Please call for more information or to host a Workshop.
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