



Natural sleep tips for youthful resilience

by Jayney Goddard MSc, PG Dip.Ed, FCMA,

President, The Complementary Medical Association

Living with chronic insomnia is brutal – it affects every area of your life and it is my deepest wish that this article will help you – if you are suffering – or enable you to share the information with friends and loved ones if they are. The difference it makes to your life when you get sleep under control is profound. In fact, I wish sleep skills were taught in schools as there's no doubt that good 'sleep hygiene' is one of the most important natural youthfulness, health-promotion and life skills there is.

Does poor sleep age us prematurely?

Needing your beauty-sleep is a real thing. A decent night's sleep is vital when it comes to looking better – we look well rested when we've had adequate sleep and we are actually perceived by others to look younger in research studies.

But it goes so much deeper than that; during sleep, we don't just zone out – it isn't simply a passive thing that happens to us and we are inert – sleep is actually a very active time – metabolically speaking. There's much more going on during sleep than we realise. A decent night's sleep gives us an inner glow and our brain works faster and better, our heart and circulatory system function improves and getting adequate rest can even improve telomere length – and all this actually makes us 'biologically' younger.

So, what actually happens when we sleep – and how does this affect the ageing process?

Our bodies repair and renew at a cellular level during deep sleep, and it is also during this phase of sleep that our Human Growth Hormone (HGH) production is at its highest. HGH plays a crucial role in healthy aging and improved metabolism. Aside from the general metabolic and physical renewal and repair that goes on during sleep, there are data to suggest that our brain actually cleanses physically, during deeper phases of sleep and that the emotions that we've experienced during the previous day are sorted through and arranged – no one knows quite what the purpose of this is, but it is hypothesised that 'arranging' things in this way may possibly facilitate recall and even learning.

Why restful sleep is so important

- Healthy sleep is an important factor when it comes to maintaining a healthy weight – and particularly in staving off the development of toxic visceral fat – this then helps to reduce the production of dangerous pro-inflammatory chemicals.
- It reduces our risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease, by reducing beta-amyloid plaque formation.
- Good sleep helps prevent the development of cardiovascular disease. Short-term sleep deprivation elevates blood-pressure and predisposes us to heart-attack, atherosclerosis and stroke – even in teenagers!
- Good sleep can help us lose weight. When we sleep poorly, a hormone called ghrelin is produced. This pushes our hunger and need for calorie intake into over-drive. Ghrelin tricks our metabolism into behaving as if we are in starvation mode and then the foods with the highest fat and sugar content suddenly become the most attractive to us.
- Mood, memory, decision-making and more are all affected by sleep – and we function more effectively, we make better decisions and we can elicit far more considered emotional responses when we are well-rested.

How much sleep do we actually need?

All the research seems to suggest that averaging about seven hours sleep a night is healthy. Having said this, if you are under stress (mental, physical or emotional), you may find that you need more sleep. If I'm working particularly hard, I find that a mid-afternoon break is really helpful. I often use the time to put on a meditation recording or listen to a hypnosis track. I find that after this 20-minute break I can bounce back, raring to go.

What are the most effective natural sleep enhancers?

Yoga Nidra

I use a yoga nidra (yogic sleep) recording every night – this is an incredibly relaxing and effective sleep promoting meditation that is based upon a body-scan technique. It is said that one 20-minute session of yoga nidra is equivalent to two hours rest. I have created a yoga nidra download for you on my website: JayneyGoddard.org

The 4,7,8 technique

This deceptively simple technique, which has its roots on ancient Vedic tradition, is a very simple, 5-step process.

Instructions:

1. Sit up straight and rest the tip of your tongue on your gum-line, just behind your upper front teeth. It should remain there throughout the process. It can feel a bit awkward, because you'll be breathing out through your mouth – with your tongue still in place. You'll make a breath sound – like a 'whoosh', as the air escapes - and that means that you're doing the exercise correctly.
2. With your mouth closed, breathe in gently through your nose for a count of four.
3. Retain your breath for a count of **seven**.
4. Breathe out fully through your mouth, for a count of eight. There will be a whooshing sound as the air escapes.
5. These steps equal one round of breathing. Repeat for a total of four rounds.

It is believed this exercise is effective because it shifts our nervous system into being predominantly para-sympathetic – which is our 'rest and repair' mode. You get the best results if you do the exercise twice a day for a couple of months.

Melatonin-containing foods that will help you to sleep

As our internal clocks sense evening hours coming on, a signal is sent out to increase levels of a hormone called melatonin, and sleep ensues. It is difficult to buy melatonin tablets in the UK – they usually have to be shipped from overseas. However, there are lots of natural sources of melatonin, and by using these you are avoiding all the fillers and chemicals that are used in tablets – just one preparation I looked at contained all these: Dicalcium Phosphate (inorganic calcium that may provoke side-effects including kidney stones, diarrhoea, vomiting), Cellulose, Crospovidone (related to formaldehyde), Vegetable Magnesium Stearate (questionable safety), Silica.

Instead, try these natural sources of melatonin:

- Bananas
- Cherries
- Dark leafy greens
- Hummus
- Nuts

Eat some of these about an hour before bedtime and do your yoga nidra or breathing exercises and you should be out for the count in no time. Jayney has created a free Yoga Nidra download, find it at JayneyGoddard.org