Master the Perfect Night of Sleep in 10 Simple Steps

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Master the Perfect Night of Sleep

Sleep is what most of us look forward to at the end of a long day. Unfortunately, many of us aren't getting enough. While there's still a lot to learn about sleep and its role in our wellbeing, we're now beginning to understand its major impact on the health and destiny of our brains.

So how does sleep actually affect our brains? It turns out that sleep may play a unique role in the development of Alzheimer's disease. The quality of your daily sleep may in fact increase or decrease your risk for Alzheimer's. And so important these days, we know that quality sleep is fundamentally important for a healthy immune system. So, it's certainly clear why it's so important to prioritize shuteye each day!

Of course, sleep does a whole lot more than influence your risk for Alzheimer's disease. It appears to affect your hunger, your metabolic rate, your weight, your immune system and even the compassion you feel for others! These effects involve our thinking, choices, and emotional state. This means that sleep influences many aspects of our brain function.

With the hectic pace of modern day life, sleep might feel like a luxury you can't afford. However, from a medical perspective, it's absolutely essential to get good sleep if you want to keep your body and brain healthy.

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In Episode 10 of Alzheimer's - The Science of Prevention, our experts explain how sleep is linked to Alzheimer's disease, and provide specific strategies for better quality sleep. Here are 10 simple steps you can take to improve your sleep starting today:

STEP 1: MAINTAIN A SLEEP SCHEDULE THAT ALLOWS FOR 7 TO 9 HOURS OF SLEEP

Having a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, even on the weekends, is one of the most important steps to mastering a perfect night of sleep.[1] This step is vital because it helps set the pace of your body's circadian rhythm.[2] When you wake up, the light comes into your eyes and resets that rhythm every single morning. If you do this consistently, your brain will know what to do and when to do it every single day. Try and stick to one sleep schedule seven days a week, and you'll be well on your way to better sleep.

STEP 2: STOP CAFFEINE BY 2:00 PM

You might want to reach for the pot of coffee when the afternoon slump hits around 2:30 PM, but doing so may impact the quality of your sleep.[3] Remember, the half life of caffeine is 6 to 8 hours, so stopping caffeine by 2:00 PM is important if you're planning a bedtime that's around 10:00 P.M. or earlier.[4] In other words, an 8 oz cup of coffee has around 100 mg of caffeine, so having a coffee at 4:00 pm means you will still have 50mg of caffeine in your system at 10:00 P.M!

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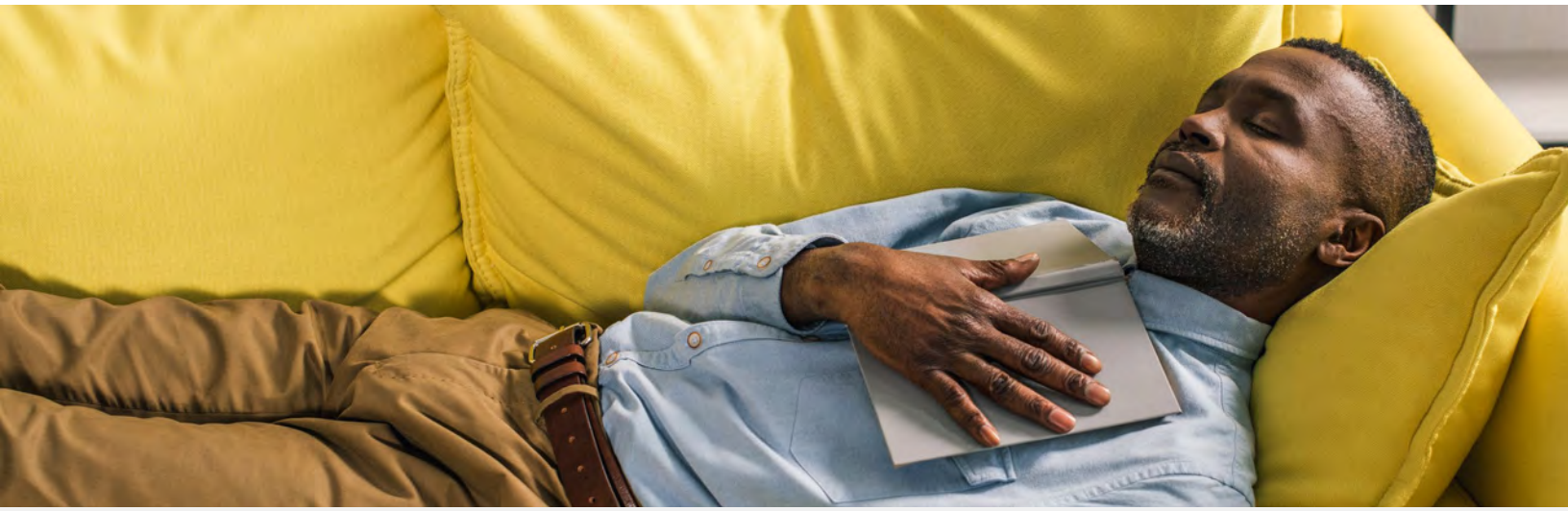
STEP 3: AVOID ALCOHOL WITHIN 3 HOURS OF YOUR BEDTIME

It may not be an issue to enjoy an occasional alcoholic beverage in the evening. The problem arises, however, if you indulge in that glass of wine or beer too close to going to bed. If your body is still digesting alcohol when you lie down, this could affect the quality of the sleep you get early in the night.[5] Ideally, give yourself about 3 hours between your last drink and lights out, so that the alcohol can be digested. This will help limit any negative effects on your sleep.[6]

STEP 4: EXERCISE REGULARLY

Getting exercise during the day can help strengthen your circadian rhythm, promote daytime alertness, and even help you feel sleepy when it's time to turn out the lights. However, it may be best to avoid exercise right before bedtime. This is because intense physical activity can raise your body temperature and disrupt sleep.[7] When possible, try to get your exercise completed at least 4 hours before bedtime, which will give you time to relax before bed.[8]



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STEP 5: GET SUNLIGHT IN THE MORNING

Believe it or not, sunlight stops the release of melatonin in your brain. This helps the brain and body to wake up and also regulates your circadian rhythm.[9] It's incredibly easy to take advantage of this information. In the first 30 minutes after you wake up, try to walk outside or go to a window for some direct sunlight.[10]

STEP 6: COOL YOUR ROOM TO BETWEEN 65°F AND 75°F AT NIGHT

Your sleep cycle follows your core body temperature cycle. In the evening, your temperature falls. This drop is a signal to your brain that it is time to sleep.[11] Sleeping in a cooler environment encourages this process, helping you get to sleep quicker and easier.[12]

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STEP 7: AVOID BLUE LIGHT AT NIGHTTIME

Blue light emitted by electronic devices like cell phones, TVs, and computers blocks your brain's production of the hormone melatonin.[13] In a nutshell, this means too much exposure to blue light too close to bedtime can make falling asleep quite difficult. If you can't avoid screens late at night, try wearing blue light blocking glasses for 2 to 3 hours before you go to sleep.[14]

STEP 8: DO A MEDITATION PRACTICE BEFORE BED

Meditation is a wonderful tool for stress relief, reducing anxiety, and getting your mind and body relaxed and ready for sleep.[15] Practicing meditation before bed can go a long way towards putting you in the mood for sleep.[16] If you've never tried meditation before, there are plenty of resources available. Breathing meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and guided meditation apps are a great place to start.

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STEP 9: GET TESTED FOR SLEEP APNEA

Sleep apnea is a fairly common sleep disturbance, and roughly 70% of people with sleep apnea go undiagnosed.[17] When it comes to getting all the benefits that sleep has to offer, it's not just about how many hours you spend asleep, but what's happening during those hours. If you aren't waking up feeling rested, consider looking into a sleep study to see if sleep apnea is an issue for you.

STEP 10: ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS FOR SLEEP

There are a number of supplements that may help you get to sleep and even sleep better throughout the night. Consider talking to your healthcare provider about the various nutritional supplements that may help you with sleep. As an example, some people may benefit from magnesium and melatonin.

If you want to further explore these 10 simple steps for a perfect night's sleep and discover more ways to improve your brain health, tune into Alzheimer's – The Science of Prevention.

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