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# HEALTH INSPIRED SLEEP

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According to the National Sleep Foundation, adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night so you're doing a great job sleeping. Here are a few ideas that you can try if something changes.

- Stick to a sleep schedule of the same bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends. This helps to regulate your body's clock and could help you fall asleep and stay asleep for the night.
- Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual. Just like kids, we need a nice story and bath time too.
- Avoid naps, especially in the afternoon.
- Exercise daily. Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no activity. Exercise at any time of day, but not at the expense of your sleep.
- Evaluate your room. Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep. Your bedroom should be cool – between 60 and 67 degrees.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows. Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. Mattresses life is only about 10 years so maybe it's time to get a new mattress.
- Avoid bright light in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning. This will keep your circadian rhythms in check.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and heavy meals in the evening. Alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine can disrupt sleep. Eating big or spicy meals can cause discomfort from indigestion that can make it hard to sleep. If you can, avoid eating large meals for two to three hours before bedtime. Try a light snack 45 minutes before bed if you're still hungry.
- Wind down. Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode, so spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity such as reading.
- If you can't sleep, go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired. It is best to take work materials, computers and televisions out of the sleeping environment. Use your bed only for sleep and sex to strengthen the association between bed and sleep.
- Take Magnesium. It helps regulate sleep quality and plays a part in helping you achieve deep and restful sleep as well.
- If you're still having trouble sleeping, don't hesitate to speak with your doctor or to find a sleep professional. You may also benefit from recording your sleep in a Sleep Diary to help you better evaluate common patterns or issues you may see with your sleep or sleeping habits.

Keep in mind that many people suggest Melatonin as a sleep aid but it merely helps set circadian rhythm which may happen from shifting sleep times and jet lag.

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## EAT WELL

According to Dr. Mark Hyman, eating whole, real foods restores balance and reduces the effects of stress on your body. Replacing harmful substances such as caffeine, alcohol, and refined sugars, with clean proteins, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats helps regulate your hormone levels, including stress hormones. Food As Medicine Education Director Kathie Swift, MS, RDN, LDN, FAND, EBQ cites the connection between the gut and brain in relieving stress. The gut and brain are constantly sending signals to each other, so by keeping your microbiota (the bacteria in your gut) healthy, your brain feels less stressed.



## SHAKING & DANCING

The quickest way to relieve stress is to release endorphins through exercise. An easy way to do this is through shaking and dancing, a form of expressive meditation that loosens your joints as well as clears the mind. It's one of our favorite techniques to teach in conflict and disaster areas, such as Haiti. Start by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, shoulders relaxed, and shake your whole body for a few minutes (we recommend 7-8 minutes). Then, stop for a minute or two and pay attention to your breathing and physical sensations. Finally, turn on fast music – anything that gets you energized, and allow the music to move you. Dance for about 5 minutes, or until you feel satisfied.



## GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sleep and stress tend to cause a vicious cycle – if you're stressed, then you can't sleep, which makes you ill-prepared to handle the stressors of the next day, leading to more stress. To relieve stress before bed, try some relaxation techniques (see below) and disconnect from technology as much as possible an hour before bedtime. To ensure the proper amount of rest (7-8 hours is recommended), set an alarm reminding you to go to bed.



## GUIDED IMAGERY & BREATHE

The body responds in essentially the same way to made-up imagery as it does to real experiences. Positive, relaxing images can be an effective tool for relieving stress. Try it for yourself with this Guided Imagery podcast from our Founder and Director Dr. James Gordon, or check out Dr. Gordon's book *Unstuck: Your Guide to the Seven-Stage Journey Out of Depression* for dozens more techniques, including scripts for guided imagery exercises. We do it all day, every day, and yet we often forget the healing powers of deep breathing. By slowing down your heart rate and lowering blood pressure, breathing deeply relieves stress. Our Soft Belly meditation is our go-to for relieving stress, but any form of slow, deep breathing can help you relax and stay calm.

