



LESSON 15: "THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP"



A healthy lifestyle doesn't just mean a healthy diet. So many factors come into play when it comes to finding more balance in your life. One of the most crucial elements in this equation is sleep. Your body needs the rest it gets while it's asleep to heal itself and recover. If you're continuously getting less sleep than you actually need, chances are you'll feel an overall lack of energy and will be at risk for numerous health issues.

According to the AASM (*American Academy of Sleep Medicine*), about one in five adults fail to get enough sleep and sleep deprivation (less than 7 hours of sleep per night) increases the risk of the following (among others):

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Mood alterations (including irritability, lack of motivation, anxiety and depression)
- Lack of concentration
- Attention deficits
- Reduced vigilance
- Lack of energy
- Fatigue
- Restlessness
- Lack of coordination
- Forgetfulness
- High blood pressure
- Heart attack
- Obesity
- Diabetes



Needless to say, getting enough sleep is crucial, but it's not just the amount of sleep that is important, it is also (or perhaps above all), the quality of sleep that matters. If you don't feel rested or refreshed when you wake up in the morning, here are some tips and tricks to implement:



-Avoid stimulants like caffeine and other substances that interfere with sleep quality (including alcohol and nicotine) at all times or at least in the hours before going to bed.

-Create your ideal sleeping environment. Make sure the temperature is just right (60-75 degrees F (15-23C) feels best for most people) and that the room is well ventilated. If you're sensitive to light, try using heavy curtains or an eye mask. Light gives your brain the signal that it's time to wake up, so you may end up sleeping less than you would have needed to while thinking that you woke up naturally. Investing in a quality mattress if you can, is also a great idea! This is where you'll be spending about 1/3rd of your time day in day out, so if there's one thing that is worth investing in, a mattress would certainly be it.

- Go to sleep when you're tired. Sounds easy enough, but how many of us have struggled closing our eyes while already lying in bed? If you've been bed for over 30 minutes and just can't fall asleep, get up and listen to soothing music or do some stretches until you are tired enough to sleep.
- Create your very own pre-bedtime routine. If you go to bed right after watching an action movie or working non-stop, you'll still be agitated and carry that onto your sleep. Your bedtime routine should consist of anything that relaxes you, which could be anything from restorative Yoga, meditation, breathing exercises or classical music.
- Leave the day (and your worries) behind. Something that has helped me personally and that I think will help those of you who tend to worry a little too much at times, is actively leaving your day behind. You can do this by journaling at the end of the day or (my favorite), by making a list of everything that you need to do or that worries you in any way. This will do two things: 1. It'll take it from your mind to paper (or screen) and 2. It'll show you that your worries are manageable and not that overwhelming. If you go to bed with a clear idea of what needs to be done the next day, you'll be more relaxed and therefore, sleep better. Our worries tend to intensify in our minds and add to that the stress about trying not to forget anything, agitation is pre-programmed.



- If you're someone who has to get up very early (when it's still dark out), consider investing in a light alarm clock. If you set your alarm at 5AM, the clock will slowly and gently start emitting light at 4:30AM and you will naturally wake up a couple of minutes before the alarm even rings (you can add the sound of birds or waves as well). I (Kim-Julie)'ve been using a clock like that in the winter for almost 10 years and it's done wonders for my mood and sleep quality. If you want to find out more about the effect light has on sleep quality, I'd recommend reading the book *The Instinct to Heal* by David Servan-Schreiber.
- Sleep in or nap whenever you can - Instead of taking a 30 min coffee break, why not try and take a power nap instead? If you're sleep deprived on a regular basis, catching up on much needed rest whenever you can can do wonders.
- Have early dinners. Luckily, vegan food digests much more easily and quickly than animal products (yay!), so even if you do have late dinners, it won't affect you as much. In case you do feel a little heavy (digestive wise) at night though, simply try to eat your dinners a little earlier (maybe 1 or 2 hours earlier) in the day or having very light meals.
- Exercise! Daily exercise (even just 15-30 min) will contribute to your overall wellbeing, but just like dinner, make sure you don't do it too close to bedtime as you may feel a little agitated afterwards.
- Stay Hydrated - with just the right amount. Drink enough water before bedtime that you won't wake up thirsty in the middle of the night, but not so much that you'll have to get up every hour to use the restroom.



The difference between rest and sleep

One last note that I wanted to add is to realize that there is a difference between rest and sleep. Have you ever woken up after sleeping for 10 hours straight, yet somehow you still felt exhausted? Even sleep can be exhausting when you're trying to process everything that is happening in your life. You may have very active dreams or be moving around all night. If that is the case for you, I would suggest looking into meditation. When practiced the right way, meditation has countless benefits, one of them being that it can give you more rest than sleep. An hour of meditation can be as beneficial as 4 hours of deep sleep. There are many books and YouTube videos on the topic, so if you're interested in learning more, make sure you spend enough time researching it as it's not quite as simple as "just sitting there and doing nothing".