

Lets talk about sleep



Written by Debbie Ballard

I got a FitBit for Christmas. You know, one of those watches that counts every step you take, tracks your heartbeat, and gives you a recap of how you slept.

I am not a very good sleeper. I think I know how long I toss and turn in the middle of the night. I really don't need to see that on the sleep recap; it just makes me worry about how much sleep I lost.

If I'm sitting and reading a book, it thinks I'm sleeping so sometimes the chart shows me going to bed at 7:30 or 8 p.m., then celebrates my nine-and-a-half hours of sleep. For the record, I can't remember the last time I slept nine-and-a-half hours.

I've always been fascinated by sleep, maybe because I have never been a good sleeper. When I was in university, I signed up for a sleep study thinking I might find out how well I slept. I didn't learn anything and I don't think they did, either, because I didn't sleep a wink. Definitely more of an "awake" study than a sleep study (I could hear people snoring in the other cubicles, however, so I'm sure they managed to get some data).

Now I have my very own sleep tracker. I do like the sleep recap because it tells you how many hours of "deep sleep" you've gotten and how many hours of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. These are the numbers I like to see.

REM sleep is when you dream. It's also important in maintaining brain health. It is thought to stimulate the areas of our brain that are responsible for learning and thinking by sending signals to the thalamus (the part of your brain that handles sensory perception) and then on to the cerebral cortex (motor function, impulse, memory—too many to get into here but very important part of your brain).

Your brain is very active during the REM sleep stage. At my age, I feel my brain needs all the stimulation it can get so I always check the REM sleep on the FitBit chart.

I always check the hours of deep sleep, too. For me, this is an indication of how rested I should feel.

It turns out there is another good reason to get a decent amount of deep sleep. An article in The Guardian, published on Feb. 9 of this year, was headlined, "The best thing you can do for your health: sleep well."

It goes on to say that not enough sleep is a contributing factor in the development of Alzheimer's disease. The theory is that your brain cleanses itself during sleep. The flow of cerebrospinal fluid in your brain increases, washing away all the waste proteins and toxins that have built up in your brain during the day.

The brain uses a sewage system called the "glymphatic system." It cleans your brain of a sticky protein linked to Alzheimer's disease. But this process only happens in periods of deep sleep. Tests have been done on mice using dyes injected into their brains

and these tests show the brain cleaning process at work.

The article in The Guardian refers to it as a "Power Cleanse."

If you're not getting enough sleep, you're not getting the power cleanse. So people with chronic sleep issues have reason to be worried. Talk to your doctor and find out what you can do to improve your sleep.

According to New Health Advisor, adults aged 18 and over need 1.5-1.8 hours of deep sleep per night. We need that sleep cycle to initiate the brain cleaning process. I have the FitBit to tell me how many hours I spend in each cycle. That can be a good thing and a bad thing. If I don't sleep well, I worry. However, it does give me information on my sleep and I can try to get better sleep if I'm not getting enough.

A lack of sleep can cause other problems, too. It messes with your hormones, in particular the one that makes you feel hungry. You want to eat and even when you're full, you still want to eat because the "full" hormone has been depressed by too little sleep.

Hello weight gain. Your blood sugar levels can be affected by a lack of sleep. Even a small change in your sleeping habits, like two or three hours a week, can cause changes in blood sugar levels.

Studies also have been done on the effects of daylight savings time. A study done on 1.6 billion people around the world showed a 24 percent increase in heart attacks in the spring when we lose an hour of sleep. Conversely, in the fall when we gain an hour of sleep, there is a 21 percent reduction in heart attacks.

This study was done on a change of just one hour of sleep.

A chronic lack of sleep or sleep deprivation has been linked to anxiety and depression, cardiovascular disease, a weakened immune system, and a greater risk of obesity (that hormone thing).

Your immune system needs seven-nine hours sleep a night. This means you have to sleep long and well. Deep sleep is most important for feeling

rested and maintaining good health.

Sleep experts have some tips on getting a good night's sleep. Try to go to bed at the same time every night. Have your little nighttime routine, just like you did with your kids when they were little—quiet time, a nice warm bath, a (not too disturbing or thriller) book to read, and then night-night.

Exercise. Oh, have I mentioned before that exercise is good for just about everything that ails you? If I haven't, I should have. Leading a physically active life makes for a better sleep (just don't exercise right before bedtime).

Food and drink. A large meal late in the evening could make it harder to fall asleep. A snack before bedtime is good, though (a light snack). Where I come from, we call it a "bed lunch." On the other hand, alcohol can



disrupt your sleep; likewise caffeine. I learned a long time ago that coffee or caffeine in the late afternoon or evening is a no-no if I want to get to sleep.

Now we know how important sleep is to our physical and emotional health. Our brain needs the nightly cleaning and stimulation. It's not just about being crabby and irritable because of a lack of sleep. Rather, we need a period of deep sleep to really feel rested.

If you're not getting a good night's sleep, talk to your doctor to see if there is an underlying problem. You

need quality sleep. As I said earlier, researchers who study Alzheimer's now think that all the gunk and waste protein in your brain is cleared out while you sleep (imagine if a habit of sleeping well turned out to be the cure for Alzheimer's).

Sleep and exercise. The keys to good health. It really does seem so simple. I'm sure they're not the key to everything but sleeping well and exercising surely will help improve the quality of life as we age.

(Further reading: "Why We Sleep: The New Science of Sleep and Dreams" by Matthew Walker).

Warm Vanilla Milk Bedtime Drink

nowcookthis.com

This is perfect when you want something comforting and relaxing before you turn in for the night. Sweet dreams!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 tablespoon honey or maple syrup, add more or less to taste
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- pinch nutmeg

INSTRUCTIONS

Place the milk in a small saucepan over medium heat and heat just until hot (don't bring it to a simmer or boil).

Turn off the heat and add the honey or maple syrup and vanilla; whisk until combined.

Pour into a mug and sprinkle with a pinch of nutmeg.

Sip on the drink for 30 minutes right before bedtime while doing something relaxing.

Notes

You could use low fat or skim milk instead of whole milk or, if you'd rather a dairy-free option, you can use almond milk, cashew milk, coconut milk, oat milk, etc., but I find that this drink has the best creamy flavor when made with whole milk.

If you're lactose intolerant, you can use a lactose-free milk.

You could heat the milk in a mug in the microwave if you prefer.

If you're not into nutmeg, try cinnamon instead.

Golden Milk

wellplated.com

Learn how to make an easy turmeric milk recipe for inflammation and better sleep.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk or coconut milk
- 2 teaspoons honey plus additional to taste (to make vegan, swap maple syrup)
- 1 1/2 teaspoons almond butter
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon plus additional for serving
- 1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1/8 teaspoon ground ginger

Optional additions: tiny pinch ground black pepper ground cardamom, or ground cloves

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the milk, honey, almond butter, vanilla extract, cinnamon, turmeric, ginger, and any optional spices in a small saucepan.

Heat over medium until warmed through, whisking briskly so that the almond butter does not stick to the bottom and the spices incorporate. Do not let boil. Pour into a mug and sip deeply.

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Mental Health Matters in the Workplace

Tuesday, February 9th, 2022 from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Mental Health Strategies in the Workplace

Tuesday, March 22, 2022 from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Employers can help to support employees' mental health and reduce burnout in the workplace. CMHA Durham's Recovery College Wellness Centre will review strategies and identify tools and resources to support to workplace mental wellness. What does positive mental health in the workplace look like? Learn more.

Register for "Mental Health Matters in the Workplace" on [Eventbrite](#) by February 8th to receive the zoom link.

Challenging stigma. Return to work. Supporting job performance for employees with mental health challenges. Join CMHA Durham's Recovery College Wellness Centre to learn more about mental health accommodations, and positive approaches to support positive mental health in the workplace.

Register for "Mental Health Strategies in the Workplace" on [Eventbrite](#) by March 21st to receive the zoom link.

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