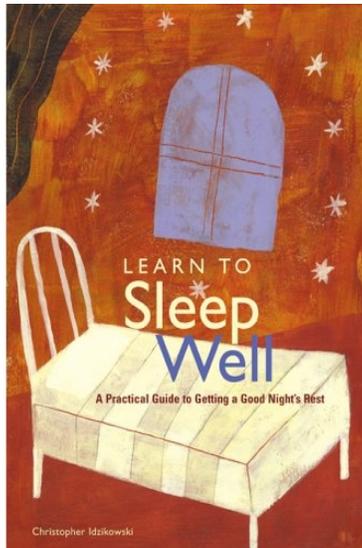


# Learn To Sleep Well

A Practical Guide to Getting a Good Night's Rest

By Chris Idzikowski.; Duncan Baird Publishers, 2000

## BOOK FOR THE WEEK:



Good sleep is everybody's birthright. Unfortunately, only one fifth of the world's population enjoys perfectly healthy, restorative sleep. Some even suffer from debilitating sleep disorders. In America for instance, between five to ten Americans suffer from insomnia. This debilitating sleep disorder not only affects the health of people, but it also has far-reaching negative economic and social effects.

Learn to Sleep Well is an inspiring guide to promoting health through improved sleep. It shares with you the key to

sleeping soundly and restoratively, as it deals with all aspects of sleep from combating various types of fatigue, to creating the most conducive environment, to a blissful and uninterrupted sleep. It gives practical and reliable suggestions on how to deal with marauding nighttime "sleep thieves," such as snoring partners, restless children, and nightmares. Moreover, you will read here expert advice on natural remedies for a deeper, more restful sleep, including meditation techniques, massage, herbalism, and aromatherapy.

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## What is Sleep?

People tend to take sleep for granted. They often view it as a revitalizing process that somehow should just “happen.” However, sleep is far more than simple rest or the opposite of complete self-awareness. In the same vein, it is erroneous to think of sleep simply as a means to conserve energy.

Sleep is difficult to define and the reasons for sleeping often elude even the experts. Sleep is a complex state in which people are generally physically inactive, yet mentally active at the same time. Also, the amount of energy saved during sleep is rather modest. The energy saved by, say, a 200 pound individual during eight hours of sleep rest as compared to eight hours of waking is more or less equivalent to a glass of low-fat milk.

Similarly, studies on sleep research claim that deep sleep forces the body and mind to momentarily stop and undertake the necessary internal maintenance work. Contrasting studies nevertheless show that the body does not repair itself during deep sleep any more than during light sleep or wakeful rest, and that most of the brain is as active when it is dreaming as when it is awake.

### Patterns of Sleep

Even though sleep patterns and the amount of sleep time vary from person to person, in general people tend to require less sleep as they get older. Having less deep sleep is inevitable, but it does not necessarily mean that sleep would be less refreshing as you advance in age. Whatever your

age, try to improve your sleep, so that you can enjoy each moment of wakefulness to the full.

There are three key influences on human sleep: the natural cycles of light and dark; a person's metabolism; and the sleeping posture (which encompass the sleep environment as well as the position in which people sleep). Only through understanding the nature, patterns, and quality of sleep will people begin to realize the ways on how to improve their sleep as well as their health.

## The Cycle of Seasons

To help you sleep well, be more aware of the effects that the seasons have on your body. Understand how these external earthly cycles affect your inclination to sleep. Tune in to these cycles, and allow your body to dictate your sleeping patterns.

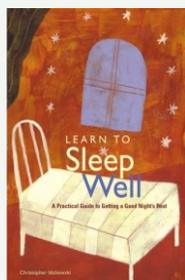
### The Body Clock

People have an internal timekeeper, known as the “biological clock,” which allows them to keep time with the sun's cycle each day. Experiments show that this biological clock works on its own 24-hour cycle (also known as a circadian rhythm), and that the environment (i.e. its changing temperature and fluctuations in light) regulates this clock so that people go to sleep and wake up at roughly the same time give or take a few hours.

You need to know whether your biological clock runs at a slightly slower or faster pace than the cycle of the sun (i.e. the 24-hour day). Those with biological clocks that run slightly slower than the sun's cycle are often called “owls.” These people go to bed late in the evening, and wake up late in the morning. In contrast, people whose biological clocks run at a slightly faster pace than the 24-hour day are called “larks.” They go to bed early, but awaken early too.

Ideally, you should allow your biological clock to dictate the amount of sleep that you take. You, on the other hand, should focus more on improving the quality of that sleep.

### ABOUT THE BOOK:



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## The Physiology of Human Sleep

Physiologically, the body's sleep and wakefulness controllers are located deep within the brain. There are three or four such areas that are in charge of sleep, and approximately double that number for wakefulness. Some sleep centers are located near the controls for other important but basic functions, such as the regulation of the body's temperature, metabolism, and appetite all of which have an impact on the person's ability to sleep well.

When people's sleep centers are all active and the wakefulness areas are all inactive, they will sleep blissfully. But when their sleep is disturbed by some stimuli, their wakefulness areas will be alerted and the other parts of the brain that will determine if the stimuli warrant further action or attention will be activated. This supports the contention that the environment in which people sleeps is a major contributor to the quality of their sleep.

### The Rhythms of Sleep

There are five stages of sleep. Stage 1 refers to a light state of sleep. People at this stage can easily be awakened. Stage 2 is the first true sleep state, in which people completely lose awareness of the outside world. Stage 3 and 4 represent the deepest levels of sleep. The last and final stage is known as the REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. This stage is distinct from the other four stages because the brain is highly active at this point. In fact, an EEG reading will reveal that the brain waves produced during REM sleep resemble those produced during wakefulness.

Nonetheless, it should be noted at the outset that people do not move continuously from light sleep (Stages 1 and 2) to deep sleep (Stages 3 and 4) to REM sleep. Instead, they journey back and forth from these stages, reaching up to five times a night. Each journey made is a completed sleep cycle, which lasts for about ninety (90) minutes among adults. Usually, healthy people should be able to fall asleep easily at the start of this ninety-minute cycle.

For healthy people and those who are not

taking any medication, the first and second cycles of sleep consist mainly of deep sleep, with about five (5) to ten (10) minutes spent in REM sleep in the first, and fifteen (15) to twenty (20) minutes in the second. As night progresses, people enter the third cycle of sleep. Here, they spend around ninety (90) minutes in light sleep and experience more REM sleep than in the two previous cycles. The fourth and fifth cycles are dominated by REM sleep, interspersed with some light sleep.

Interestingly, research has shown that the ninety-minute cycle can also be found during wakefulness. Knowing and understanding the sleep cycle will greatly help in identifying low-points in the brain's awake cycle. This in turn will allow people to adjust their bedtime schedule to coincide with these low-points, which will substantially improve their chances of falling asleep.

There are other factors to consider in getting a good night's sleep. One of which is the amount of stress experienced by people as they go to sleep. In these cases, they should rely more on their brain's ability to switch off their wakefulness controls, and simultaneously activate their sleep centers. Simply put, people should learn to relax their minds and bodies before they go to sleep. Once relaxed, the conflict between the sleep and wake controls will be resolved.

### Reclaiming Lost Sleep

There will be times when the normal 24-hour sleep-wake cycle is disrupted. Despite this, the body has ways of recouping lost sleep. The body has the ability to reclaim the lost sleep on subsequent nights. You could also take a nap.

There is, however, a downside to this. People who are always sleep-deprived will invariably put up with "unintentional sleep." One example of this is the drowsy, luring kind of sleep that threatens to overwhelm those who start on a long and tedious journey already feeling tired.

## Improving the Quality of Your Sleep

To improve your sleep, you need to know first what is wrong with it as well as identify the aspects of your lifestyle that have a negative impact on it.

Begin by assessing your energy levels. Take note of your mental and physical well-being. In addition, assess your sleeping environment. It would help if you monitor your progress in a journal by noting when you go to bed, how long it takes you to fall asleep, how long and how well you sleep, and how you feel when you wake up.

### The Sleeping Body

Modern lifestyles in the West have disrupted the natural sleep patterns of people. Poor diet, smoking, and a high consumption of alcohol and caffeine have likewise affected sleep. Hence, people should adopt behaviors that are more sleep-friendly, and that promote a healthier, more harmonious lifestyle.

### Sustenance for Sleep

Look into your eating routines, and assess how the food that you eat affects how you sleep. For one, avoid having one big meal at the end of the day, and try not to eat a main meal later than three hours before you go to bed. Aim to eat little and often, rather than having one light and one heavy meal a day.

Bear in mind that eating energizes the body. It causes the body's metabolic rate to increase and its temperature to rise. Hence, it stands to reason that eating before sleeping will affect your ability to fall asleep.

At the same time, be mindful of what you eat. Eating unhealthily will have an adverse effect on your sleep, not to mention the possible food-related disorders that you may suffer because of it. What's more, take vitamins and food supplements. Make sure that you include a healthy dose of B-vitamin and magnesium-rich foods and supplements into your diet.

Plus, prefer organic foods over foods and/or beverages that contain harmful additives, like monosodium glutamate (MSG) and tartrazine (E-102). Furthermore, drink three to four pints of water each day. Avoid drinking beverages that have caffeine and alcohol as much as possible. Give up on smoking too, as cigarettes contain nicotine.

### Keeping Your Body Fit

Leading a sedentary lifestyle can adversely affect the quality of your sleep. It can cause tension to build up. This built up tension eventually becomes a source of stress, making you restless and uneasy.

One simple way to release stress is to exercise. You could do some stretching or light calisthenics before you sleep. If you are up to it, you could do some vigorous exercises. Three sessions of twenty minutes per week will do the trick, provided that you supplement it with some aerobic exercises that will boost your heart and circulation.

Make sure to choose a sport or activity that you enjoy. If you get bored with your current exercise regime, try other activities. Just don't overdo things. Remember, injuring yourself will certainly not help you sleep better.

### Alternative Forms of Relaxation

Taking a warm bath before going to sleep can do

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Dr Chris Idzikowski** has been involved in sleep research and medicine for more than 20 years. He originally worked with Professor Ian Oswald in Edinburgh on the restorative hypothesis of sleep. Subsequently, he went on to Cambridge to study anxiety and fear, and then to the Janssen Research Foundation, Oxfordshire where he ran, at its time, the UK's largest sleep laboratory. This work led to his book: *Serotonin, Sleep and Mental Disorder* (1991). He is a member of the US Sleep Research Society, European Sleep Research Society, is the former chairman of the British Sleep Society, board member of the US Sleep Medicine Foundation, member of the clinical and educational sub-committees of the European Sleep Research Society and runs the Sleep Assessment and Advisory Service which provides support for general practitioners and primary care physicians both in the UK, Ireland and Europe. He set up a working group of patient self-help groups so that these groups could exchange information. Over the years he has researched into many drugs, hypnotics, antidepressants, and antipsychotics, aromatherapy, and has looked at disturbed sleep in insomniacs, dementia, chronic fatigue syndrome (M.E), cancer patients, AIDS, depression and many other areas. His professional background of clinical pharmacology and psychology provides him with a unique insights into sleep and its disorders.

wonders to sleep problems. According to the principles of Chinese hydrotherapy, warm baths promote the smooth flow of qi and better blood circulation. Nonetheless, take care not to spend a long time in the bath or have the water temperature too high as this might raise your body temperature; thus, keeping you awake.

You could also try the soothing power of touch. Massage can provide an enjoyable, therapeutic way to relax. It helps restore balance in the body and encourage a refreshing, restorative sleep.

You could also take herbal remedies to help the body combat the ailments (physical or mental) that lead to sleeplessness. Try placing a few drops of herbal essence in your bath or use an oil burner and inhale the aroma as part of a pre-sleep relaxation exercise. Insomniacs, for instance, are said to benefit from drinking herbal tea or from using aromatherapy.

## Harnessing the Creative Powers of the Mind

It is the mind that gives context and meaning to thoughts. As such, needless worrying over things which you have no control, and other similar negative mental activities will only worsen your sleep problems. The key to having a good night's sleep is to relax your mind, and to banish whatever mental discomfort you are forcing on yourself.

### **Banishing Worries through “Thought Management”**

One way to banish worries is through “thought management.” This entails expelling obsessive, anxiety-inducing, wakefulness-promoting thoughts from your mind. A good starting point is to try to put your anxieties about the past into perspective. Learn to accept and acknowledge your achievements despite having failed to live up to your or to other people's expectations.

Moreover, instead of setting perfectionist targets, arm yourself with positive statements before you go to sleep to disable those negative thoughts. By constantly telling yourself that “No one is perfect,” you will gradually accept the past and acquire a

new-found confidence in yourself.

Another useful type of “thought management” is to determine, as objectively and as dispassionately as possible, if your worries are justified or not. Do not jump to conclusions without any supporting evidence. Do not focus on the bad or unfavorable aspects of a situation and disregard completely the good aspects.

### **Casting Off Anger**

Pent-up anger can give rise to sleep disruption, so it is vital that you deal with anger before you go to bed. There are many ways to release aggression. You could do some physical activities or you could practice a gentler way of releasing anger, such as doing meditation, yoga, or visualization techniques.

Above all, avoid arguments and confrontations as bedtime draws near. If an argument or confrontation is unavoidable, try your best to let those angry feelings and tensions dissipate.

### **Meditation, Visualization, and Hypnotherapy**

Meditation, or “restful alertness,” is the process of consciously stilling the body and the mind to promote deep relaxation. As the improvement of sleep depends heavily on your ability to relax, it is worth trying to explore the practice of meditation. When you meditate with the aim of promoting sleep, remember that humans are essentially spiritual beings who can rise above the unnecessary baggage of material existence.

Visualization, on the other hand, refers to the act of seeing a scene, object, person or action in your mind's eye. The more vivid and lifelike the image, the more effective your visualization is. Visualization is quite useful in the quest for sleep improvement. It helps the mind focus on matters other than those that induce anxiety, and it slows down the heart rate, which consequently encourages you to relax.

Conversely, hypnotherapy involves putting a person into a deeply relaxed state. The hypnotherapist can then implant positive suggestions into the subconscious mind. This method is successful in treating the common causes of insomnia, such as pain and anxiety.

However, there is little evidence to show whether hypnotism can improve sleep directly.

## The Sleep Environment

The precise location of your bed, the comfort of the mattress on which you sleep, the temperature in your bedroom, the noise, and the variations of light in your room can all have a profound effect on the quality of your sleep.

### Temperature and Sleep

Research has shown that 62°F (16°C) is the temperature generally conducive to a restful sleep, while temperatures above 71°F (24°C) will most likely cause restlessness. In the winter, set the heater to go off in the evening and to come on again in the morning. In contrast, during summer, you should have the air-conditioning on during the evening and through the night, and time it to go off as your time to wake up approaches.

You could also use drapes to help control the temperature in your bedroom. Ideally, use lined white drapes during hot summer days; whereas during winter, heavy drapes are more preferable. And for maximum sleep comfort, always choose loose-fitting nightwear made from natural fabrics, such as cotton, wool or silk.

### Keeping it Peaceful and Quiet

The calming, relaxing effect of listening to sounds that resemble ocean waves, or to a recording of the real sounds of the sea, has been shown to aid sleep. Studies made on the effects of listening to such sounds on intensive care and premature baby units have been encouraging. Patients demonstrated significant improvements in sleep depth, as well as fewer awakenings and an ability to return to sleep faster. On the other hand, avoid background noise that can disturb you, yet not enough to wake you up as this has been shown to have a bad effect on the sleep cycle.

### Blissful Beds

The basic things to look for in a bed are its width and

length, as well as the type of base and mattress. A bed should be as wide as possible, and should be about four to six inches longer than the tallest person intending to sleep in it.

The base of the bed should fit your requirements. It typically depends on the degree of firmness that you require. The mattress should match the base of the bed perfectly. They should feel comfortable, and should mould to the shape of your body.

When shopping for a mattress, check whether it offers appropriate support. As a rule, the mattress should allow your spine to rest in its natural “S” shape. To check if it does, lie on your back and slide your hand under the small of your back. If your hand fits snugly under the small of your back, then you have found the perfect mattress for you.

Moreover, choose pillows that will give you adequate support for your head. In general, if you sleep on your back or side, you should use a firmer pillow than if you lie on your stomach. Finally, prefer beddings made from natural materials, like cotton and wool, as this can do much for your comfort levels.

### Light and Spectrum

The intensity and color of light can influence sleep in different ways. The intensity of light does not affect the sleeper directly; however, its main impact is determined by our sleeping habits. If you are used to sleeping in the dark, it would be better if you sleep with the lights turned off, and vice-versa.

Colors, on the other hand, can have a strong effect on mood. So, it is important to paint your bedrooms in shades that will encourage rest. Shades of blue and green are typically relaxing for most people; or you could opt for neutral colors instead, such as white, and just vary the tones of your linen, rugs, and cushions until you find the most relaxing hues for you.

### Feng Shui in the Bedroom

According to Feng Shui, your bedroom should be a regular shape (square or rectangle) with simple decorations and free from clutter. Also, avoid putting mirrors on the walls. If you need a mirror in your bedroom, try not to place it opposite the bed

as it will reflect energy back to you while you sleep.

In addition, the bed should be raised off the floor to encourage a balanced flow of qi around the sleeping area. Likewise, position your bed in a place where, as you lie, you can see people entering the room.

If you have an en suite, avoid putting your bed between the door to the en suite and the bedroom door. Failure to do so will put your bed in the path of another conflicting energy one cleansing, and the other restful. Moreover, if direct sunlight falls across the bed during the day, it would be better if you move your bed to a more shaded position, as the energy of the sun is not right for a sleeping surface.

Finally, Feng Shui experts stress the importance of sleeping with your head in the correct position. According to them, you should sleep towards the most auspicious direction in accordance to the Chinese laws of zodiac. In so doing, you will maximize your potential for health and well-being.

## Overcoming Sleep Problems

Sleeping disorders are a serious matter. It can be debilitating, not to mention dangerous. It is important to learn how to recognize sleep disorders, and learn to cope with them.

### Insomnia

Sleeplessness and insomnia are different. Sleeplessness happens when a person desiring sleep is unable to have it; whereas, insomnia is a condition that occurs when someone who has previously been a good sleeper suffers from chronic sleeplessness, lasting for several weeks at the least.

Generally, avoid alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine. Also, do not exercise within three hours of bedtime. Likewise, make sure that the bedroom is light proof and that your bed is conducive to restful sleep. For serious cases of insomnia, pharmacological help is often required; thus, it is best to consult a doctor about it.

### The Restless Legs Syndrome

People who experience “restless legs” often feel a strange, unpleasant creepy-crawly sensation in their legs, which forces them to get out of bed and walk around. As a result, they lose sleep because of it. Although this is relatively harmless, it can cause sleeplessness, and even insomnia. Try massaging your leg muscles before going to bed. This will promote relaxation and stillness in those muscles.

Also, check your caffeine intake. Studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between caffeine and this disorder. Additionally, reduce your alcohol intake, and exercise regularly; however, avoid exercising within three hours before bedtime. Finally, if possible, delay your bedtime until after midnight and sleep on until 9AM or 10AM, as restless legs occurs usually in the late evening and early night.

### Sleepwalking and Night Terrors

There is very little that can be done to prevent sleepwalking. The only and best way to do is to make sure that the sleepwalker will not harm themselves when they do sleepwalk. Remove any objects that they could trip over. You could also put some objects which the sleepwalker is frightened off to deter them from exiting the bedroom. Although this may sound farfetched, it has been proven successful.

Night terrors, conversely, are a feature of deep sleep. They often start with a piercing scream accompanied by physical manifestations of fear, such as rapid heart-rate and breathing, and perspiration and dilating pupils. There are no certain ways to prevent night terrors, but you could try reducing the intensity of deep sleep by sleeping longer. Since night terrors occur mainly among children, the best course for a parent is to simply accompany them through the experience.

### Sleep Paralysis and Narcolepsy

Paralysis of the body's muscles occurs every night during REM sleep and is perfectly normal. The experience can be frightening, but it is certainly not permanent. However, it can cause people to fear falling asleep.

People who suffer from narcolepsy are afflicted by sudden and uncontrollable bouts of sleep often preceded by a complete loss of strength in the muscles, and hallucinations. This disorder is rare. However, it is quite debilitating, not least because of the social implications of the susceptibility to fall asleep at any time. There are prescription drugs that can help combat narcolepsy, but it can also be effectively tackled by taking a nap.

### **Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea is a serious condition. It occurs when the breathing passages of sufferers become temporarily obstructed. This happens because the tissues of the soft palate are sucked closed, which stops the person from breathing. The pause in breathing is often accompanied by a loud snore as the obstructed airway is cleared, and the person awakens momentarily. In some cases, the person may wake up aware that they cannot breathe, which can be a very frightening experience.

Apart from the serious dangers to the person's health, sleep apnea also causes the person to be sleepy during the day. This condition has been cited as the primary cause in the rise of road traffic accidents.

Sufferers from sleep apnea may be helped by using a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine. There is also a surgical procedure that they can opt for, called uvulopalatoplasty.

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