

# To Sleep or not to Sleep: What does it do to us and what can you do about it?



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It strikes me that the number of people around me who are chronically ill sleeping has increased enormously in recent years. I see it in my circle of friends, my sports club and my clients. And by chronically poor sleep I mean less than 7 hours of sleep a night, difficulty falling asleep, waking up early in the morning and not getting up rested the next day.

As a coach, I almost always encounter it with clients with burnout. And now that I'm seeing more and more people struggling with it, I think it's time to share what it takes to get a good night's sleep. Understanding what good sleep brings us and what the consequences of poor sleep are so that we can tackle chronic sleep deprivation.

## **This is what people tell me when they sleep poorly:**

1. Difficulty sleeping (lying awake for 30 minutes or longer)
2. Wake up early in the morning and cannot get to sleep
3. Wake up several times a night and do not fall asleep again
4. Stress and worrying make it harder to fall asleep
5. The body is still too much in the action mode
6. Sleeping feels unsafe, not wanting to let go of control
7. Physical discomfort or pain making relaxing difficult

8. Chronic diseases that cause sleep problems
9. Medications that have sleeping problems as side effect.

Apart from the above points 7, 8 and 9 where medical guidance is indispensable, there is a lot we can do ourselves to sleep well. And I am going to tell you more about that in this blog.

But first, I want to share with you what **the consequences of chronic sleep deprivation** can be.

Sleep studies have shown that a significant number of diseases are associated with sleep deprivation. Let me mention a few of them that we often see around us: **cancer, diabetes, heart attacks, infertility, obesity, Alzheimer's, dementia, depression, chronic pain, disruption of the immune system.** Of course, more factors may play a role, but sleep deprivation plays a demonstrably important role in this.

In addition, it affects our **performance at home and at work**, driving, learning and concentration and our moods. So good reasons to make good sleep important in your life.

And of course, there is also the other side of the coin, what does good sleep get us? This may help you to get motivated with good sleep hygiene.

### **The benefits of sleeping well:**

- You get up the next day rested and vital and feel like you can handle life.
- A good night's sleep increases your learning capacity by 40%.  
The information you received during the day is transferred from short-term memory to long-term memory and connected to previous knowledge and experiences.
- Dreams are the cradle of creativity and help solve problems, even if you do not remember your dreams.
- During our dreams we process the emotions of the day which contributes to emotional stability.  
*"The best bridge between despair and hope is a night of good sleep"*  
— Quote from American entrepreneur E. Joseph Cossmann
- Adequate sleep helps balance our nervous system and is good for your intestinal flora. Enough sleep ensures that our sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight response) is balanced with our parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation).. The excessive production of cortisol due to stress causes bad bacteria in your intestines to increase and not all nutrients are properly absorbed. Our parasympathetic nervous system balances this process.
- Sleep is also important if you want to lose weight or avoid diabetes.  
Sleep deprivation has an effect on the hormones that determine your appetite leptin and ghrelin. Leptin sends out the signal that you've eaten enough and ghrelin causes a feeling of hunger. With sleep deprivation less leptin is produced and more ghrelin is created, so your body doesn't know when you've eaten enough.

- Adequate sleep protects you from diseases and infections. Research shows that with 5 hours of sleep, the chance of a cold increases by 50% after administration of the common cold virus.

## Fourteen simple and practical tips for sleeping soundly

1. Stick to a fixed sleep pattern. Go to bed at the same time every day and get up at the same time every day. It's a myth that sleeping longer on weekends can compensate for the sleep deprivation you've built up over the course of the week. On your phone, you can set an alarm for when you want to go to bed, making it easier to get into the rhythm.
2. It is extremely healthy to exercise daily but preferably not too late in the day. Try to exercise for at least half an hour each day, preferably no later than 2 or 3 hours before bedtime.
3. Avoid **caffeine and nicotine**. The stimulating effect of caffeine can stay in your body for 8 hours. Drinking coffee after 2 pm should be avoided. Nicotine is also stimulating and can therefore cause sleep problems. In addition, smokers often wake up early in the morning due to withdrawal symptoms.
4. **Alcohol before bed** is not a good idea. Many people think that a nightcap can help you fall asleep more easily, but too much alcohol keeps you stuck in lighter sleep stages and so you don't get the REM sleep (Rapid Eye Movement sleep) or dream sleep. Hefty alcohol consumption influences the breathing and can lead to sleep apnea. And you usually wake up early in the morning because the alcohol wears off.
5. **Eating a lot or heavy food late at night** ensures that your body can no longer digest this properly. Also be moderate with what you drink in the evening, otherwise you may have to get out a few times for a toilet break.
6. **Be alert to medications** that affect sleep. Sometimes it can help if you are allowed to take the drugs at a different time of the day, consult your doctor for advice on this.
7. Going to sleep in the afternoon usually causes you to be less tired in the evening and to build up less so-called "sleep pressure" to fall asleep in the evening. It is better to do something relaxing and go to bed on time in the evening.
8. Do something that relaxes you before bed. For some that's listening to music, for others it's a meditation or a mindfulness exercise.
9. You can take a hot bath/shower at bedtime. This will wash down all impressions of the day and drop your body temperature, making you sleepy.
10. You sleep best in a dark, cool room without disturbing noises and a comfortable bed for you. If you do not fall asleep right away, you can also make sure you can't look at the clock to avoid worrying about what time it is and why you haven't slept yet.

11. What many people do not know is that sunlight is important to our sleep patterns. Walking outside or cycling for at least 30 minutes a day if possible with sunlight helps. In the dark days, bright light in the morning is an alternative. In the evening it is important to dim the lights well before bedtime.
12. If you still cannot sleep after 30 minutes in bed, get out and have a cup of tea or do something relaxing until you feel tired and then get back in bed. Staying in bed can cause a lot of stress.
13. If you experience a lot of stress, it is important to activate your parasympathetic nervous system (which provides relaxation). You can do this through yoga, meditation and breathing exercises. On the Internet you will find a whole lot of possibilities to get acquainted with this for free. A very relaxing form of yoga is "yoga-nidra", where you lay down in a relaxed way focusing your attention on different parts of your body. Doing this exercise will have the same effect as sleep.
14. When a lot of worrying is the cause of your sleep problems you can take mindfulness lessons and breathing exercises generally help well. The simplest form of this is to focus your attention on your breathing for 5 or 10 minutes and put your hands on your stomach. This invites the breathing to get deep into your belly without being forced to breathe towards it.

With the tips above, you can take the first steps towards getting longer and better sleep.

However, more may be needed to address the root causes. For example, because you have problems at work or in your relationship, are going through major changes in your life or have lost a loved one. In these situations, one or more conversations with a coach can help you find solutions and restore the balance in your life.

You can sign up for a free coaching interview with me of 30 minutes via [my website](#) When signing up please include your name, phone number, email address and free coaching call in the comment box. You can sign up [here](#).

If you are interested in more background information about sleep then I can recommend the book **SLEEP by Matthew Walker**. In it you will find many scientific insights about sleep and dreams that are very worthwhile.

On the free Insight Timer app you'll find several **Yoga Nidra recordings** including Yoga Nidra for sleeping 18 minutes and lots of meditation.

At <https://www.healthline.com/health/alternate-nostril-breathing> you will find a very relaxing **breathing exercise** that they call changing nostril breathing. On YouTube you can join <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIVug0ToIzo> with instructions for belly breathing. It is a short video how to do belly breathing in different positions.

**Constance Schaap**, Dutch Ambassador [RAINBOW Letters to Mother Earth](#)

