

## Natural Solutions to Reclaim Rejuvenating Sleep

Getting rejuvenating sleep every day makes it to the top of any human's wish list. Lack of restful sleep is a global epidemic amongst the urban city dwellers. Persistent lack of sleep (insomnia) reduces the quality of life and the sense of wellbeing. It adversely affects mood, reduces performance at work, and increases the risk of injury and accidents. It also leads to significant long-term health problems outlined above.

Lack of restful sleep over an extended period should alert an individual to take steps to reverse insomnia before it disrupts mental and physical health. Reclaiming rejuvenating sleep requires three essential strategies:

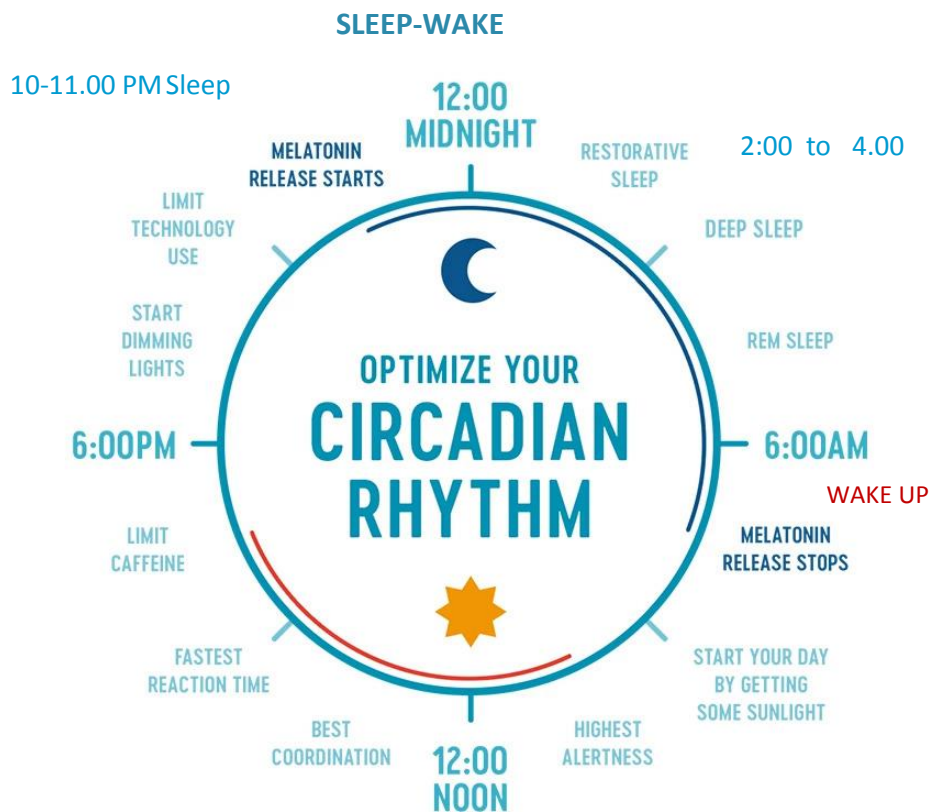
1. ***Normalize 24-Hour Circadian Sleep-Wake Cycle***
2. ***Cultivate a Healthy Attitude and Behavior Towards Restful Sleep***
3. ***Practice Good Sleep Hygiene***

### ***Normalize 24-Hour Circadian Sleep-Wake Cycle***

Sleep is a vital biological process controlled by the chemical adenosine produced during daily activity and by the sleep hormone melatonin produced in the brain in response to natural light. Taking a lesson from the science of natural sleep outlined above, the sensible guidelines for normalizing sleep-wake cycle are as follows:

- ***Set aside 7-8 hours to sleep in your daily 24-hour schedule.*** Restful rejuvenating sleep is the most critical activity in life. Keep in mind that sleep deprivation will reduce performance and eventually lead you to a more difficult problem—insomnia.
- ***Keep a standard wake-up time.*** A perfect indicator of restful deep sleep is an automatic wake up with no alarm clock. The consistent need for an alarm clock to wake up in the morning suggests a lack of healthy deep sleep. There is no harm keeping an alarm, but most days, it should serve as a backup tool.
- ***The morning wake-up time sets the standard sleep time at night.*** If you wake up by 6-7 AM, it will be natural to fall asleep by 10-11 PM. As outlined above, the deep rejuvenating sleep occurs in the first half of the sleep night. The typical human biological night is 10 PM to 7 AM. So sleeping late at night or past midnight robs you of the rejuvenating deep sleep.
- ***It is winding down that helps deep sleep.*** The sleep hormone melatonin secretion begins by 9 PM (see the picture of the circadian cycle below). That is an excellent time to start winding down and prepare for sleep by disconnecting from digital devices, including mobile phones.
- ***Conclude eating by 8 PM to be able to sleep by 10-11 PM.*** The food in the stomach raises the core temperature of the body by one degree, with the shifting of the blood to the digestive tract (in Ayurveda called *Jathar Agni*). For deep rejuvenating sleep, the core temperature must come down by a degree. The late eaters are, therefore, always poor sleepers.
- ***Boost melatonin synthesis with the morning light signals.*** The sleep hormone melatonin gets synthesized in the pineal gland of the brain in the morning hours on exposure to sunlight or bright daylight. Waking up late and keeping indoors in the morning hours reduces melatonin

secretion affecting the quality of sleep. The mood-elevating substance serotonin and melatonin are both synthesized in the pineal gland of the brain in response to the natural light signals of the morning. Depression and suicide are more common in the geographic areas of the world where sunlight is scarce. Insomnia and depression are interrelated problems, and one leads to the other.



### ***Cultivate a Healthy Attitude and Behavior Towards Restful Sleep***

First and foremost is bringing about an attitude change that sleep is a priority in life. It is a valuable investment and not a waste of time. Consider the following guidelines to change your behavior and attitudes:

- ***Stay loyal to your standard wake up time.*** That is regardless of how much sleep you get on a given night. This practice helps in establishing a stable and robust sleep pattern. The body will catch up by itself, making you sleepy earlier the next night.

- **Wind down before sleeping.** Solve your problems, resolve your conflicts, and take care of your to-do list an hour or two before going to bed. The biggest obstacle to falling asleep is going to bed with a speeding brain, thinking about plans and solving all problems.
- **Get out of bed if not sleeping.** The average time between closing the eyes to falling asleep is 20-30 minutes. If you are tossing and turning for an hour or more, it is better to get out of bed and do an activity which winds you down such as reading a book (not on the computer which is emitting blue light, but a paper book), listening to soft music, doing relaxation exercises, or meditation with a focus on breathing. Return to bed only when sleepy again. Staying in bed too long without sleep is anxiety-provoking.
- **Discard negative thoughts about not being able to sleep.** People with insomnia are anxious and apprehensive about the consequences of no sleep. It is their common habit to look at the clock on how many hours they have slept or not slept. You will be surprised that despite poor sleep for a night or two, you will do alright when the day dawns. It is the thought which hurts more than the consequence of poor sleep. Once you cultivate this resilient attitude and confront insomnia head-on, things will get better fast.
- **No afternoon naps longer than 30 minutes.** As discussed above, afternoon naps weaken the adenosine sleep drive, which is vital to the process of sleep initiation.
- **Keep the bed for sleeping purposes only.** The human mind is programmed psychologically to think of the bed as a sleeping place. When you do activities such as watching television, answering e-mails, or eating meals in the bed, you are confusing your subconscious program of the bed being the sleep site.
- **Try sleep restriction.** An excellent way to manage insomnia is sleep restriction. That means restrict yourself from getting into bed until sleepy even if it is a late hour. Less time in bed works better than a long time in bed, tossing and turning worried and thinking about sleep.

### ***Practice Good Sleep Hygiene***

Sleep hygiene is about changing lifestyles, which interfere with sleep. It requires patience and determination to change long-held habits regarding foods and beverages, social life, sleep environment, etc. In addition to the above two strategies, a lifestyle change via sleep hygiene goes a long way to promote sleep.

- **Limit caffeine intake.** As discussed above, caffeine is a stimulant and is a significant deterrent to sleep. Caffeine effects linger for hours, so it is preferable not to drink caffeinated beverages after 3-4 PM.
- **Limit alcohol.** As discussed above, alcohol makes you fall asleep quickly, but sleep quality is poor and not refreshing. If you have insomnia, avoid drinking in the evening or get into the trap of drinking alcohol as a sleep aid.

- ***Do not indulge in strenuous physical activity and exercise after 7 PM.*** Physical activity and vigorous exercise in the morning improves sleep onset time by increasing the level of adenosine. However, after 7 PM, exercise induces an increase in the level of adrenaline that antagonizes adenosine effect. A light exercise like walking after dinner is refreshing before bedtime.
- ***Avoid eating after 8 PM.*** Eat at least 3 hours before sleeping time, and avoid dense or fatty foods. These stay in the stomach too long and cause acid reflux and bloating, interfering with sleep. Late eating also increases core temperature (*Jathar Agni*), which interferes with deep sleep.
- ***Ensure adequate exposure to sunlight or natural light in the morning.*** That enhances production of the sleep hormone melatonin, which is vital to rejuvenating deep sleep.
- ***Avoid exposure to blue light at least 1-2 hours before sleep time.*** Blue light exposure from cell phones, computers, and other screens inhibits the release of the sleep hormone melatonin in the brain. Melatonin is the vital hormone for a deep rejuvenating sleep.
- ***Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine.*** Read a printed book or magazine, listen to relaxing music, or chant or meditate to calm down the brain.
- ***Avoid emotionally upsetting conversations and confrontations before bedtime.*** It helps to walk out of conflict situations to preserve a good night's sleep.
- ***Keep the sleep environment comfortable and pleasant.*** Have a comfortable bed with light-colored bed linen, dim the lights to unwind followed by darkness, and keep room temperature low.

