

7 Steps to Sleep Well

*Power your performance, health and happiness with
Sleep*



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Our sleep each night powers our days so we can be at the top of our game, easily perform well on the job. It also powers our day so we can be mentally and physically healthy, and make good choices. Ultimately, healthy sleep fuels our happiness, so we can enjoy time off, and time with our loved ones.

Yet for many people a good night's rest is not a sure thing. People worry about the long-term health impact of not sleeping well, and the toll it's taking on their performance on the job. Some people realize that poor sleep is contributing to irritability and anxiety. There's a real loss when poor sleep has us avoiding fun, and social time with our friends and family.

These 7 Steps are all strategies you can use right now, today, to start improving your sleep. Doing all these steps for the next seven days can make a noticeable impact on your nights, and thereby an impact on your day!

Here's to you having the best day possible, by putting in place that foundation of good sleep.

~ Dr. Catherine Darley

Step 1

The most common sleep problem is simply not getting enough sleep. Unfortunately, not getting sufficient sleep each and every night causes all five functional domains to suffer. (And no, "catching up" on sleep on days off doesn't work. Wouldn't that be nice?!)

✓ Check-in: Where do you feel it the most when you don't get enough sleep?

Physical health

Mental health

Emotional intelligence

Cognitive performance

Physical performance

Let's make sure you are getting the sleep you need. Think back to a time when you were well rested, at peak performance, feeling good all day.

✓ Check-in: How much sleep do you do best with (not just what you can 'get by' on)? _____ hours per night.

❖ Plan: Make a commitment to yourself that you'll get that amount of sleep every night. You'll be glad you did!

Step 2

Next let's make sure you are sleeping at the right hours for your body clock. Deep in the brain there's an area that makes us be more of a morning person, a "lark", or a "night owl" who stays up later.

- ✓ Check-in: What time are you naturally sleepy at night? _____.
- ✓ Check-in: What time do you naturally wake in the morning? _____.
- ❖ Plan: Considering how much sleep you need from Step 1, and your best sleep times, your wake time will be _____ and your bed time will be _____.

Step 3

One of the key factors that impacts our sleep is light exposure. Many people say they have heard this, but didn't think it could really make that big of a difference. The sleep and alert centers of the brain are actually very sensitive, even a night light could change your sleep. Blue light from electronics is the worse. Instead, we want to honor the evening light conditions people have been in for thousands of years.

- ❖ Plan: Turn off electronics, and turn down the lights one hour before bedtime, at _____.

Step 4

Not only the light at night, but also the light in the morning makes a big difference in both sleep and alertness. Getting 20 minutes or more of bright light in the morning helps us feel sleepy at night. And getting bursts of bright outside light every couple hours is important too. It can feel hard to get that outside light because there's so much we have to do inside.

- ✓ Check-in: What are some things you *could* do outside?
Read news Check email Phone calls Walk the dog
Get exercise Take a mental break Have a meal
- ❖ Plan: Go outside each morning for 20 minutes at _____.

Step 5

Make your bedroom a sleep oasis. Our environment does make a big difference in how well rested we are. Here are some of the features of a good bedroom: - cool, - quiet, - comfortable bed, - very dark, - no lit clock, - no phone, - no daytime activities or clutter, - door closed for sleep, - no pets or family members coming in

- ✓ Check-in: While reading that list, did any of those stand out as a problem?
- ❖ Plan: Take 30 minutes today to make these changes so your bedroom is a great place to sleep.

Step 6

After years of working with people to improve their sleep, it's clear that alcohol and caffeine may be impacting sleep more than we'd like. Alcohol can initially help us fall asleep, but will wake us later in the night. The effects of caffeine can disrupt some people's sleep even 8 (or more!) hours afterwards. The recommendations are to avoid caffeine after noon, and alcohol for the three hours before bedtime.

- ✓ Check-in: Do you drink caffeine or alcohol closer to bedtime than recommended, or do you suspect it might be impacting your sleep?
- ❖ Plan: Do a trial of no caffeine after noon, or alcohol for 3 hours before bed. Then once you know how it's impacting your sleep, you can decide whether to change your habits.

Step 7

For some people, their thoughts are so active at night that they can't sleep. If this is you, there are skills you can learn to put your thoughts aside. First, adopt the attitude that sleep hours are just for restoration, and don't take your responsibilities to bed with you. This can be hard, especially if you haven't processed your thoughts enough during the day. Take 10 minutes, a couple hours before bed, to write out your thoughts in whatever format makes sense for you. Then close the book on those thoughts. If your mind starts racing in the night, tell yourself something like "I already thought about that, and will have time tomorrow, now's time to rest."

- ✓ Check-in: Are you thinking things through in the night that you could take care of during the day?
- ❖ Plan: Do the journaling exercise every evening, learning to set your thoughts aside so you can sleep well. This skill will become easier over time.

Take the time to work through these steps today. First reflect on the check-ins, then do the plan steps. This will start the process of improving your sleep. And most importantly will start to shape your days with more energy, better performance, and the ability to enjoy your time off, and your loved ones!

Thank you for taking the time for this important work. If you're interested in a deeper dive into improving your sleep to power your life, Skilled Sleeper offers online courses for individuals, and programs for corporations.

Sleep well!

~ *Dr. Catherine Darley*

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