sound sleep

From immunity to hormone balance, your health depends on logging adequate snooze time

By Karolyn A. Gazella

When we think of sleep, we think of a time to rest, a time of inactivity when our bodies can wind down from the day's events. But that's not the case. When we sleep soundly, there is a whirlwind of interior activity as our bodies repair muscles, release hormones, bolster immunity, and energize our cells. Getting enough sleep—or not—affects our ability to concentrate, our moods, and even our weight. It also affects how our bodies age.

"Chronic sleep loss may not only hasten the onset, but could also increase the severity of age-related ailments such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and memory loss," says Eve Van Cauter, PhD, professor of medicine at the University of Chicago.

In addition, lack of sleep is associated with depression, anxiety, and even accelerated aging. "When we are tired, we feel edgy, irritable, and are more reactive to stress," says holistic pharmacist Sherry Torkos, author of the Better Nutrition Healthy Living Guide Relax.

The most common sleep complaint is insomnia. It affects about one-third of the American population, with women more than twice as likely to experience it as men.

Is It Insomnia?

Many people are not getting the recommended seven to nine hours of sound sleep per night. Do all of those people have insomnia? If you have difficulty falling asleep, can't stay asleep, and/or experience poor sleep quality at least three nights a week for more than a month, you have insomnia.

Some people have what's known as stress-induced insomnia, when the stress of everyday living gets in the way of a good night's sleep. This type of insomnia can be difficult to manage because we often can't simply remove the stressor, such as money problems or job pressures.

Insomnia can be maddening. As a result, many people turn to over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription drugs. These drugs are not without their side effects, which can include dependence, confusion, dry mouth, and morning drowsiness. Some people experience allergic reactions, and these drugs can interact negatively with painkillers, sedatives, other drugs, and alcohol. Withdrawal from sleeping medications can also cause nausea and a worsening of insomnia. The good news is that there are many natural ingredients that can provide a viable, and safe alternative to OTC and prescription sleeping pills.

Sleep-Enhancing Supplements

For those suffering from chronic insomnia, just drinking a cup of chamomile tea in the evening is often not enough. The following natural, scientifically validated, safe alternatives to OTC and prescription sleep medications pack a bit more punch.

Melatonin is best known as a natural
cure for jet lag. However, many studies have shown it to be very effective for insomnia. A 2008 study showed that 5 mg of melatonin daily helped shift-working nurses fall asleep more easily. The newest information regarding melatonin is that a controlled release form is proving to be even more effective. A recent report in the journal Expert Opinion on Investigational Drugs showed that a prolonged-release melatonin supplement significantly improved morning alertness and sleep quality in patients over age 55. Melatonin is particularly effective for people having difficulty falling asleep, although the sustained release form may help you stay asleep.

Gamma amino butyric acid, also known as GABA, is an amino acid proven to be an effective natural insomnia treatment. In 2008, researchers from Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston showed that nonmedicated individuals suffering from insomnia have significantly lower levels of GABA in the brain. The recommended dosage for GABA is 250 to 1,000 mg one to two times per day, taken 45 minutes before bedtime. In 1990, tryptophan was taken off the market due to contamination. Today, pure, pharmaceutical-grade L-tryptophan (trade name TryptoPure) is back on the market, so people can take advantage of this powerful natural substance. L-tryptophan is an amino acid that has been shown to naturally enhance sleep. L-tryptophan crosses the blood-brain barrier where it is converted to serotonin and later further metabolized into melatonin. The recommended dosage of L-tryptophan is 500 to 3,000 mg, 30 minutes before bedtime. Talk with your doctor before combining tryptophan with antidepressant medications.

For stress-induced insomnia try L-theanine. “For several years I have been impressed that Suntheanine (a brand of L-theanine) is the only substance, natural or otherwise, that reduces feelings of stress and improves sleep quality without creating drowsiness or diminished motor performance,” explains Michael R. Lyon, MD, medical and research director of the Canadian Centre for Functional Medicine with the University of British Columbia. Try 200 to 500 mg of L-theanine, one to three times daily, alone or in combination with GABA.

In addition to achieving seven to nine hours of sleep each night, it is important to experience quality sleep with fewer awakenings. For this, Michael Murray, ND, recommends 3 mg daily of methylcobalamin, (vitamin B12). Murray says studies show methylcobalamin improves sleep quality, increases alertness during the day, and helps individuals feel refreshed in the morning.
Honor Your Gut Instinct
Improve your internal environment with a system that is much more than a mere probiotic
Dr. Ohhira's Probiotics 12 PLUS Original Formula helps to restore the entire complex of friendly bacteria necessary for optimal health and:

- Increases energy
- Promotes healthy metabolism
- Improves antioxidant status
- Helps relieve anxiety and blue moods
- Improves sleep
- Stimulates cell repair mechanisms
- Improves joint and muscle function
- Supports immune system

Friendly bacteria make vitamins A, B₁, B₂, B₃, B₆, B₁₂, K and Biotin right in our intestines. They also help digest our food, detoxify harmful substances, aid hormone balance and, of course, improve digestion and elimination.

"In my opinion, Dr. Ohhira's probiotic is the most unique probiotic in the world today."
Fred Pescatore, MD

*These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

ESSENTIAL FORMULAS

Available at better health stores nationwide.
For more information call (972) 255-3918 or visit www.EssentialFormulas.com

THE LEADING EDGE

What's New?

While melatonin, GABA, and tryptophan are popular and effective natural sleep aids, there is a less well-known, but equally impressive, natural substance you might want to try: Seditol is a propriety combination of Magnolia officinalis bark, shown to have antianxiety properties, and Zizyphus spinosa seed, which has a history of use for insomnia in traditional Chinese medicine.

Researchers recently tested Seditol on 295 volunteers with mild-to-moderate sleep difficulties. The researchers concluded that Seditol helped improve restful sleep and reduced fatigue associated with lack of sleep in more than 80 percent of participants. Nearly 90 percent said they felt more relaxed on the product.

Product Examples (from top to bottom)
- Bluebonnet PHARMACEUTICAL-GRADE L-TRYPTOPHAN 500 MG
- Irwin Naturals POWER TO SLEEP PM liquid softgels with GABA, melatonin, and theanine.
- Natural Factors STRESS RELAX TRANQUIL SLEEP with 5-HTP, theanine, and melatonin.
- American BioSciences Inc. SLEEP SOLVE 24/7 with melatonin, 5-HTP, magnesium, and Seditol (magnolia).