

Improve Your Memory Tomorrow by Sleeping Well Tonight!

Proper sleep is essential for brain health. In fascinating new research, scientists have shown that your brain actually cleanses or “washes” itself during sleep. The brain has a special waste management system that helps get rid of toxins that build up over the course of a day, including the beta-amyloid plaques associated with Alzheimer’s disease. Your brain is so busy managing your life during the daylight hours that this cleaning system is pretty much turned off. In fact, one theory about why people with dementia sleep so much is that their brains are trying to clear out the accumulating plaques/gunk.

Without healthy sleep, the brain’s cleaning crew does not have enough time to do its job, and trash builds up, causing brain fog and memory problems.

How would your home look if no one cleaned it for a month? That is the effect chronic insomnia can have on your brain, and unfortunately, it is all too common, affecting one in four people.[i]

Many lifestyle habits, illnesses and stresses can trigger insomnia, including poor sleep hygiene (such as drinking caffeine at night or leaving the phone on next to the bed), depression, worry, restless leg syndrome, hormonal imbalances (especially progesterone in women) and shift work.

Researchers suggest we aim for seven to eight hours of sleep a night; it seems to be the sweet spot for most people. Getting less than seven hours is associated with lower overall blood flow to the brain and a higher risk of dementia, and it can disrupt hundreds of health-promoting genes.[ii]

To get a better night’s sleep and allow your brain time to

clean itself up, try one or more of the following ideas. If something doesn't work, experiment with other techniques until you notice your sleep improving.

Set up your bedroom for sleep. It should be cool, completely dark, and quiet. The ideal sleeping temperature may vary from person to person, but it should be on the cool side. If your room is too light, consider hanging blackout shades, and try using earplugs if you live in a noisy neighborhood or sleep next to a snoring spouse.

Block gadget disruption. Stash your phone, tablet and digital watch away from your bed, or at least turn the sound off. Face your digital clock toward the wall so that you aren't distracted by luminescent numbers.

Ban pets from the bedroom—or at least keep them off the bed.

Try to fix emotional problems before bedtime. If you are a worrier, devote about 10 to 15 minutes before bedtime to your nagging concerns; then put a stop to them. If you're at odds with someone, send him or her a positive text or email—or determine to deal with the issue in the morning. In other words, "Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Eph. 4:26). Doing so may prevent your anger from festering and growing further.

Establish and stick to a regular sleep schedule. Try to go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning, including on weekends. Getting up at the same time each day, regardless of how long you slept the previous night, will help set your internal body clock, which can keep insomnia at bay.

Read a book before bed. Preferably pick up something thick or tedious, such as Leviticus in the Old Testament. If you read the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament or the latest Stephen King thriller, it is likely to keep you up. Avoid reading from an e-reader or tablet; its light will keep your

brain alert.

Don't take daytime naps—even if you have trouble sleeping at night. Napping is one of the biggest mistakes insomniacs can make since it compounds the nighttime sleep-cycle disruption.

Lull yourself to sleep with sound therapy. Listening to audio of soothing nature sounds or soft music, or taking in white noise from a fan, may enable you to drift off easier. Studies show slower classical music or any music with a rhythm of 60 to 80 beats per minute may help with sleep.[iii] Sleep-enhancing music by Grammy Award-winning producer Barry Goldstein is available at .

Drink a cup of warm, unsweetened almond milk. Add a teaspoon of vanilla extract (the real stuff) and a few drops of stevia. The combination may increase serotonin in your brain, helping you sleep.

Don't exercise within four hours of bedtime. Regular workouts are a great way to combat insomnia, but vigorous exercise late in the evening may keep you up.

Wear socks to bed. Warm hands and feet are the best predictors of rapid sleep onset, according to researchers.

Cut out caffeinated beverages in the afternoon or evening. Refrain from drinking coffee, tea or other caffeinated beverages after 2 p.m. Also avoid chocolate, nicotine and alcohol—especially at night. Although alcohol can initially make you feel sleepy, it actually interrupts sleep.

Don't look at the clock if you wake up in the middle of the night. Checking the time can make you feel anxious, which aggravates the problem of sleeplessness.

Use the bed and bedroom only for sexual activity or sleep. Sexual activity releases muscle tension and a flood of natural hormones. Adults with healthy sex lives tend to sleep

better and feel better overall. If you are unable to fall asleep or stay asleep, move to another room.

Stay away from benzodiazepines and traditional sleep medications. When medications are necessary, I often prescribe trazodone, gabapentin and amitriptyline to my patients.

Develop a relaxing nighttime routine that encourages sleep. Turn off all electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime, and lower the lights in your house. A warm bath or shower, meditation, prayer or massage may also help you relax. (Download helpful meditations at .)

Adapted from *Memory Rescue: Supercharge Your Brain, Reverse Memory Loss, and Remember What Matters Most* by Daniel G. Amen, MD, available --- from Tyndale House Publishers.

[i] R. C. Kessler et al., "Insomnia and the Performance of US Workers: Results from the American Insomnia Survey," *Sleep* 34, no. 9 (September 1, 2011): 1161-71, doi:

[ii] E. J. Van Someren et al., "Disrupted Sleep: From Molecules to Cognition," *Journal of Neuroscience* 35, no. 41 (October 14, 2015): 13889-95, doi: ; J. C. Chen et al., "Sleep Duration, Cognitive Decline, and Dementia Risk in Older Women," *Alzheimer's & Dementia* 12, no. 1 (January 2016): 21-33, doi:

[iii] L. Harmat L. J. Takács, and R. Bódizs, "Music Improves Sleep Quality in Students," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 62, no. 3 (May 2008): 327-35, doi: