

The 4 Stages of Sleep and Their Importance

To live powerfully, it's important to rest powerfully. Have you heard of power naps? Did you know that they could be hazardous to your health? True!

Napping in the afternoon or long naps in the early afternoon can interfere with nighttime sleep, and sleep deprivation can trigger many short-term and long-term health risks.

What are the stages of sleep, and why are they important? Are there natural solutions we can use to help us get a good night's sleep? This writing will cover both of these questions.

There are two types of sleep necessary to keep our body and brain in optimum condition: NREM (non rapid eye movement, or "quiet" sleep) and REM (rapid eye movement, or "dream" sleep). Let's look at what both do to help in the renewing process of the brain and body.

NREM

- Restores the physical body
- Occurs in first 90 minutes of sleep
- Releases growth hormone, encouraging tissue growth/repair
- Blood focuses on muscles, not brain
- Stimulates immune system to defend against infections

REM

- Restores the brain
- Occurs after NREM sleep
- Clears out brain "junk mail"
- Captures memories that allow learning to take place

According to the Cooper Institute in Dallas, Texas, healthy sleep occurs when NREM and REM cycle through stages of sleep throughout the night. There are four stages to NREM sleep that need to occur before REM sleep begins.

Stage 1: Light sleep; lasts about 10 minutes. During this time, you feel calm and experience sudden arm and leg movement. Your heart rate lowers, and the eyes open without awareness. If you are awakened, you feel in a state of “half-sleep.”

Stage 2: Begins a sleep that lasts about 30-45 minutes. During this time, there is lack of movement, and you become oblivious to your surroundings. If you wake up during this time, you do not remember your dreams.

Stage 3: Brief time before stage 4. While you are in this stage, your heart rate and breathing slows down, and you display active brain waves every few minutes.

Stage 4: Deepest sleep takes place. It is in this sleep stage that complete relaxation occurs. Blood pressure, heart rate and respiration lower; this is sometimes referred to as “human hibernation.” If you’ve heard “You only grow when you’re sleeping,” this is the time. Eighty percent of all human growth hormone is released in this stage to grow and repair tissue. You will feel groggy for up to an hour if awakened in this stage.

REM occurs 90 minutes into sleep. This is when the eyes dart back and forth and the body temperature and blood pressure rise. The pulse and respiration rates go up as the brain begins racing.

You need to sleep eight to 10 hours continuously to cycle through these stages three to four times. Every time you cycle, the length of the REM sleep increases while the deep NREM decreases until you have a good 30 minutes in dream sleep without any deep sleep occurring—that is considered healthy

sleep.

What Can You Do Naturally to Get a Good Night's Sleep?

Here are some tips from my friend Jean Dukes, a certified natural health professional and a certified aromatherapist. She has practiced nursing for 20 years and now does natural health counseling through her Ten Days Health Ministry. Here are her thoughts on fighting sleep deprivation using aromatherapy:

“Before I knew anything about essential oils, I thought they were just pleasant odors. But I have since learned that essential oils are God’s original medicines and have powerful therapeutic effects, meaning they have healing properties. A good definition of *aromatherapy* is ‘skilled and controlled use of essential oils.’

“If you have difficulty sleeping, you must first determine the cause of your sleeplessness. Is it due to hormonal changes, pain, worry, internal chatter or stress, for example? Then you must specifically address that issue.

“After age 40, sleep quality and quantity often deteriorate as melatonin production decreases. Sun helps stimulates melatonin production in the brain. So be sure to expose yourself to the sun, don’t wear sunglasses, and ‘sun’ your eyes by looking at the sun through closed eyelids. This will help increase your melatonin levels, promoting a deeper and more restful sleep, as well as having positive effects on your mood.

“Scents of many essential oils exert a powerful calming effect on the mind through their stimulation of the limbic region of the brain. The limbic system is a group of brain structures involved in emotion, motivation and emotional association with memory.

“Historically, lavender is probably the aroma that comes to mind to calm and aid sleep. In one study, lavender oil was

applied to the pillows of nine elderly patients. After one week, eight of the nine patients reported improved sleep duration and quality.

“You can put a few drops of lavender oil on your hands, rub them together and then rub your pillow before retiring (and be sure to cup your hands over your nose and inhale deeply and slowly too). Or you can dilute some lavender oil in a small spray bottle of water & mist your pillow and sheets. Be sure to shake well before spraying, as oil and water do not mix easily.

“Essential oils can also be dispersed by means of a diffuser, which encourages tiny droplets to go out into the air. Just inhaling them can cause positive effects—physically, emotionally and even spiritually.

“Roman chamomile oil has calming and relaxing properties. It is often used for restlessness, anxiety, ADHD and insomnia—and combats depression, sleeplessness and stress. Apply two to four drops to the wrists and ankles, diffuse and/or inhale directly.”

Jean can be reached at 10days@, or visit her website at .

With 70 million people suffering with sleep problems, I felt the urge to bring this information to you. I pray it brought you to the great place of “Aha!” Many of us need to visit there often to keep the cobwebs from making a home in our grey matter, myself included.

Linda Goldfarb is a certified physical fitness specialist, speaker, and syndicated radio talk show host. You can download her weekly Not Just Talkin' the Talk radio broadcasts, a one-hour variety talk show based out of San Antonio, Texas, at . Linda's show encourages listeners to “walk the walk” spiritually, physically and relationally each and every day.