

In the Interest of Better ZZZZZs (Part1)

Many of us may never experience the blissful sleep of Lord Tennyson's 'Lotos-Eaters', who, after eating the lotus fruit, slept deeply and were absolutely apathetic. However, we can enjoy great sleep that makes us purposeful and productive.

There are few things as 'painful' as sharing a room with someone who sleeps immediately his/her head touches a pillow, and continues to sleep peacefully - sometimes even snoring (that has its own shortfalls) like a trumpet. Over the years, sleep-deprived people have tried many tricks to get a few hours of quality sleep, but most of the time, their efforts have been in vain. You may have heard about counting sheep, reading a boring book, listening to cool music, etc. I have even come across the suggestion that if you read the Bible, the devil will supposedly cause you to fall asleep, because he doesn't want you to reap the joys of the good Word.

If you do not get enough sleep, you increase your chances of being prone to accidents, performing poorly at your job, catching a cold, gaining weight, getting diabetes, getting depressed or anxious, having high blood pressure, and even having a heart attack. So get your sleep habits in good order, and talk to your doctor if you have more serious sleep problems.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, medication is often not the best option, unless your sleep-deprivation is caused by a medical condition diagnosed by a health professional.

Most of us will enjoy some decent sleep if we adopt the following lifestyle modifications:

- **Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends**
- **Avoid caffeine after noon**
 - Tea lovers may have to stick to the decaffeinated versions.
- **Don't drink alcohol 2 hours before bedtime**
 - Yes, you may initially get some sleep, but it will not be restful, and it will be very short.
 - You may also break your sleep from waking up several times to urinate.
- **Limit your intake of fluids - in general - before bedtime, so that you won't have to use the bathroom during the night**
- **Do not eat a heavy meal at dinner, and reduce your intake of spices and oil**
 - These cause discomforts which make sleep even more difficult.
 - However, make sure that you do not go to bed hungry, as this can keep you awake and 'will even give you stars' to count.
- **Exercise regularly, but not too close to your bedtime**
 - Exercising is a great way to improve the quality of your sleep, but if it is done about two hours before bedtime, it may rather excite/stimulate us and keep us awake.
 - Exercising four to six hours before bedtime is ideal, since the drop in core temperature around this time facilitates sleep. If this timing is still not suitable,

make sure you make time within the God-given 24 hours to do at least a little exercise.

- Practice deep breathing exercises throughout the day, especially just before bedtime.
- **Keep your weight in check**
 - Being overweight comes with a lot of strings attached, and poor sleep happens to be one.
 - Not only do overweight people experience regular body pains, but a majority of them suffer from sleep apnoea, which makes restful sleep a nightmare.
 - Many diseases that adversely affect our sleep may also be precipitated by weight well above the ideal for our height.
- **Keep your bedroom as cool, dark and quiet as possible**
 - No listening to radio programmes (although certain types of music may be ideal) or watching television.
 - Do not dump your office work on the bed and combine sleep with work. Something will have to give.
 - Good ventilation is also a plus. Putting on a ceiling or standing fan in a poorly ventilated room does not save the situation.
- **Relax before bedtime by taking a warm bath or by meditating**
 - Note that your bath should not be in scalding water
 - Relaxing also implies that you know that you can't solve all problems, so there is no need to use sleep hours to find solutions. Better still, leave all your problems with the Almighty God, and enjoy the ride to the island of the lotus-eaters.
- **Get a massage**
 - This helps to relax you; you may get some zzzz during or after.
- **Avoid naps during the day**
 - When sleep is so essential to you, napping during the day may be a big mistake. Try to stay awake till the evening. Of course, this does not apply to night shift workers. Some of us can only sleep for a fixed length of time, and napping steals part of this. You know what will follow, right?
- **When in doubt, PRAY.** You will agree with me that talking to God will be a great way to spend those trying hours. Many people happen to fall off to sleep the moment they start to pray.

If you are really sleep-deprived, I am certain you will be willing to try all these at once. If you find the list too long, then, dear reader, you have not yet reached the point of desperation, so take it easy.

Is it possible that some of us find it so difficult to sleep because we were born with an 'altered biological clock'? Let's find out next week, as we discuss some conditions that make us want to curse the night.

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References:

1. Harvard Medical School
2. Health/Fitness – Insomnia
3. Webmd