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 JULIE BARNES

THE ART OF SLEEP

More Than Just Counting Sheep

We've all heard our fair share of advice for getting a good night's sleep: Limit screen time before bed. Invest in a good mattress. Let the soothing sounds of Bon Iver lull you to la-la land. (OK, I made that last one up, but it sounds legit).

Given the ubiquitousness of sleeping tips today, why are

so few of us actually getting the zzz's we need to lead a healthy life?

Sleep educator and fatigue management specialist Carolyn Schur says one of the problems is that we don't value sleep—but if we understood its importance, we'd make it a priority. "I'm trying to get

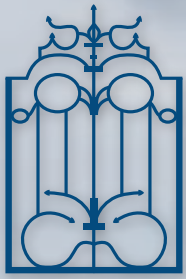
people to choose sleep before chores. Unfortunately, in our society, we tend to choose chores before sleep."

The Golden Standard

According to the National Sleep Foundation, there is some variability (especially among age brackets) when it

comes to how many hours of sleep we need.

"The golden standard for adults, however, is between seven to eight hours of sleep on most nights" says Carolyn. "There is a lot of data now that shows adults who get between seven to eight hours of sleep not only have the best ➤



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outcomes in terms of good health, and are least at risk for illness and injury, but they also have the longest lifespans." Once you have less than seven hours, the possibility of having a health dysfunction of some kind is greater.

Night Owls and Early Birds

"One of the reasons some people don't get enough sleep has to do with what's called circadian type," says Carolyn. Essentially, it's whether you're a night owl, an early bird or somewhere in between. "Night owls are more affected because in our society, we believe it's a good thing if you're up at 6 a.m. In my research, they make up 25 per cent of the population and are always going to be sleep deprived if they have to wake up early for work."

And it's not as simple as telling a night owl to go to bed

earlier, Carolyn says. "Sleep is your default, but it works on its own time mechanism." We don't get to choose which camp we fall into—our circadian type is driven by our physiology.

Effects of Sleep Deprivation

Carolyn explains that sleep is a primary driver of health. "When we are sleeping, our brain is regenerated so that we can be alert. Our immune system is supported so that we're not catching everything that's going around." Generally, with sleep deprivation, "one of the first outcomes is a kind of really low-grade depression, and it's because you don't have energy. You don't feel motivated."

Often, when we don't get the restorative sleep our body needs, our immune system suffers, our blood pressure rises and we become type-2

diabetics, says Carolyn. The long-term effects have more significant health consequences, including increased risk of heart disease, stroke and cancers.

If that weren't enough reason to get your 40 winks, consider that sleep deprivation isn't just bad for your health, it's dangerous. "When we are very tired, we are mentally fatigued, and it's mental fatigue that causes poor judgment and increases the risk of accidents," Carolyn says. "Someone who has missed a night of sleep is beyond .08 in terms of their impairment."

In her work, Carolyn presents on topics such as fatigue management. "I say, 'impairment is impairment,' and, 'you wouldn't jump into your truck if you'd had half a dozen beer, but you lose a night of sleep and you think

nothing of getting in your truck and driving.'"

Protecting Sleep

As much as she advises clients to "choose sleep," Carolyn also advocates for protecting sleep. "Protecting sleep means avoiding interruption so anything you can do to minimize noise," she says. Barking dogs and blaring sirens are a fact of life in urban areas, and we can try to tune them out with white noise or earplugs.

Our body's sensitivity to light is another big factor, and the degree of sensitivity varies from person to person.

"We now live in a society, especially if you're in an urban area, where light is starting to be considered a pollutant," she says. "Any kind of light is an indicator to the body to wake up. So, when you've got light coming through your windows



SLEEP AND STRESS

Stress is a common factor that keeps us awake at night. If it's keeping you from drifting off to dreamland, Carolyn has a few tips that can help.

- About an hour before bedtime, write down all the things you need to take care of in the morning. Transferring your mental to-do list onto paper can help relieve your spinning thoughts.
- If you're angry or frustrated about something, write it down before bed, says Carolyn. "My very unscientific term for it is 'dumping.'" It doesn't need to be eloquent, it just has to get out of your head.
- "Yoga stretches are great," says Carolyn, adding that taking a bubble bath, or listening to calming music are also helpful ways to relax and transition to sleep. Simply Googling "music for sleep" will turn up a number of options.

and off your electronic devices, that's going to interfere with your sleep."

For shift workers, avoiding sunlight as you head home after a night shift is vital, as it signals the body to stay awake. "You need to go home and go to bed, so we recommend you wear very dark sunglasses when driving home."

Napping

When you have a 20-minute nap, you're just getting a 'booster. "The pressure to sleep builds up the longer you're awake," says Carolyn.

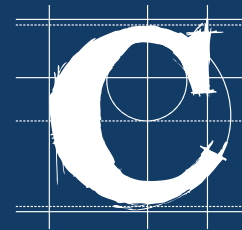
"A short nap takes the pressure off so you're not as sleepy, but you're not reaping all the benefits sleep provides."

"Once you get beyond 20 minutes, you start to get into the deeper phases of sleep," says Carolyn. "When you have slept for an hour and a half, you have gotten a full cycle of sleep."

She adds that napping is prophylactic, a type of emergency response that should be limited to 20 minutes if at work. "There's lots of evidence that napping is a very good protective measure in the ➤



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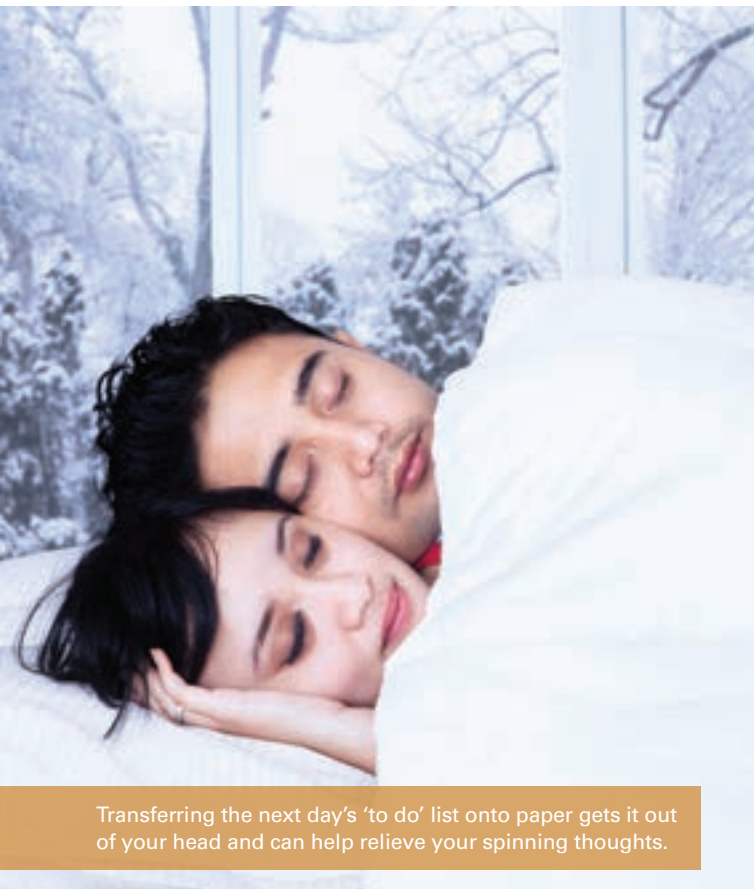
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About 60 per cent of the population are successful nappers.



Transferring the next day's 'to do' list onto paper gets it out of your head and can help relieve your spinning thoughts.

workplace to keep people more alert and prevent accidents and injuries."

So, can you make up for lost sleep?


"In the short term, we can make up a little bit," says Carolyn. She gives an example of someone who slept just five hours the previous night. If they decide to sleep for an hour and a half during the afternoon, and go to bed an hour early that night, they can make that up. Perhaps they're half an hour short, "but it's not a big deal." In the long term, naps aren't going to cut it for the chronically sleep deprived.

"Some people are not successful nappers," she adds. "That tends to be night owls because of the way their body's physiology works. The people who are really successful nappers, especially in the afternoon, are the intermediate

types—somewhere between a night owl and an early bird. They are 60 per cent of the population and their body physiology really pushes them to an afternoon nap."

Sleep and Productivity

When we're sleep deprived, we're less productive. We make mistakes, we have to think twice and read things over a second time, says Carolyn. "Whereas when you are rested, you are much more productive. You have energy and you think clearly."

Carolyn says that society tends to "worship at the altar of productivity" and that mindset compromises our shut-eye. We need to remind ourselves that our "to-do lists disappear much more quickly if we are rested." 

Julie Barnes