

SUMMARY

THE SLEEP

SOLUTION

CHRIS WINTER



Summary of “The Sleep Solution” by W. Chris Winter

Written by Alyssa Burnette

If you're looking for a sleep guide that won't put you to sleep, W. Chris Winter's collection of helpful tips is *The Sleep Solution* for you!

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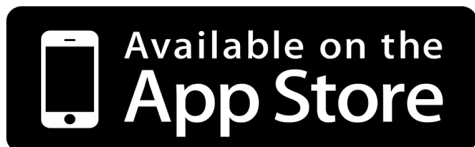


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Introduction

If you think of yourself as neither an early bird nor a night owl, but as some form of permanently exhausted pigeon, chances are that you're not getting enough sleep. And if so, you might want to re-think your sleep routine for a variety of reasons, starting with the fact that it actually requires four hours of deep, restful sleep to help you catch up on just one hour lost. There's also the tiny, insignificant fact that your life literally depends on sleep. So, if you'd like to live longer and improve your quality of life, keep reading and unlock Chris Winter's solution for finding restful sleep! Through this summary, you'll learn:

- Why there's a difference between being sleepy and experiencing fatigue
- Why your phone is your sleep cycle's worst enemy and
- What insomnia really is

Sleep is Crucial for Your Health

If you're like me, you love sleep. Those moments where you feel like you could become one with your bed and you feel yourself melting into the pillows are just heavenly! When you get enough sleep, you feel better, have more energy, and your mind is clearer as you move through your day. We all know love sleep, but many readers might also share my problem of never getting enough of it. We know sleep is supposed to make us feel refreshed, but it never seems to feel that way when we crash into bed at 3:00 am after a long day's work and re-awaken at 7:00 only to do it all over again. And while that definitely leaves us feeling sluggish and groggy, improper sleep can have some other scary side-effects, like getting sick.

For example, a 2015 study conducted at the University of California found that out of all the people who might be exposed to a cold virus in the course of their day, the people who typically get less than 6 hours of sleep a night are significantly more likely to catch a cold. That's because sleep boosts your immune system, which means that people who get more sleep-- an average of 7 hours or more per night-- are more likely to stay healthy. Lack of sleep also increases your risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, and lots of other heart-related problems. It can also lead to the development of blood clots in your system, which is another leading cause of strokes.

And as if all this isn't bad enough already, lack of sleep can damage your brain! This was discovered by scientists Aleksanteri Aspelund and Antoine Louveau, who-- ironically-- were working on the same project, miles apart from each other at different universities. They discovered the brain's glymphatic system, They learned that the glymphatic system is responsible for removing toxins in the brain, including amyloid beta, which is known to cluster in the brains of people who suffer from Alzheimer's. They also discovered that the glymphatic system is 60% more effective when you're sleeping as it uses this down-time to clean out the brain's toxins. Researchers at Stony Brook University in New York have since discovered

that this process seems to work best if you're sleeping on your side. So, if you want to boost your brain's ability to do a nightly clean-up, you might try altering your sleep positions!

Sleepiness and Fatigue Are Not the Same Thing

If you've ever gone to college, you know that suffering often seems to be a competition among students. "I only got 6 hours of sleep last night!" someone will complain, only to be scoffed at by someone who snorts, "That's nothing, I got 2!" This kind of banter often helps minimize the general suffering and remind students that everyone's struggling, but the truth is that sleep deprivation is no joke. And although many people believe that they can still function properly on little to no sleep, from a medical perspective, that couldn't be more incorrect.

This was confirmed by a 2003 sleep study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania. For the purposes of their experiment, researchers grouped participants into 4-hour, 6-hour, and 8-hour sleeping cohorts and conducted some tests at the end of the study. While most of the participants in the 6-hour group said they were feeling fine or didn't believe themselves to be seriously impacted by their lack of sleep, 25% of them had fallen asleep before the end tests were even finished! This affirmed the researchers' theories that we're more significantly affected by a lack of sleep than we think and that without a proper amount of sleep, we're incapable of functioning. So, how do we handle sleepiness? Well, the first step is to learn a little more about it.

It might sound like the most obvious thing in the world to say that sleepiness is caused by a lack of sleep, but that's an important starting point in understanding sleep. That's because this is how we differentiate between sleepiness and fatigue. Where sleepiness is more easily identifiable as being tired or really wanting to go back to sleep, fatigue can be better described as a lack of energy. Although these are two very different feelings and conditions, the terms are often used interchangeably and that's incorrect. Because unlike sleepiness, fatigue can't be improved simply by getting more sleep. It also has a variety of causes, including a vitamin B12 deficiency, diabetes, and depression. And since a prevailing sense of fatigue could be a

symptom of an underlying issue, it's important to talk to your doctor if you're getting a healthy amount of sleep and still experiencing fatigue.

Sleep Has Three Distinct Stages

We've heard of the sleep cycle, but what does that actually mean? Your sleep cycle comprises the three distinct stages of sleep you should experience during the night to get satisfactory sleep. The first stage is light sleep, which is that in-between place you sort of drift into as you're falling asleep. You're not quite awake, but you're not deeply asleep, and you can easily wake up during this stage. Light sleep can be divided into two categories called N1 sleep or N2 sleep. It's likely that you'll only spend 5% of the night in N1 sleep, but N2 comprises about 50% of your night's sleep stage. We know about these categories because we can actually measure them through variations in brain patterns.

The second stage is deep sleep, or N3 sleep. This is a period of restoration and it's the stage that's responsible for making you feel refreshed and ready when you wake up. It's also responsible for encouraging growth and boosting your immune system, as we discussed in the first chapter. Because it can strengthen your bones and muscles, help you recover from injuries, and aid your immune system in fighting off potential illnesses, this sleep cycle is definitely your best friend! It occurs primarily during the first half of your night's sleep cycle and most adults spend 25% of their sleep cycle in this stage, although you'll be disappointed to know that this number only decreases with age.

The third and final stage is REM sleep, often referred to as "dream sleep." You probably already know that REM stands for "rapid eye movement" because, during this cycle, your eyes move at a very fast rate even from beneath your closed eyelids. Although scientists have been able to prove that this happens, they don't yet know much about why. REM sleep is especially interesting because, during this cycle, your brain's activity is very similar to what it is while you're awake. This stage also accounts for the other 25% of your night's sleep and on average, you experience it between four and five times during the night. You stop regulating your body's

temperature during this phase and drift into dreams that you may or may not be able to recall in the morning.

The Importance of a Healthy Circadian Rhythm

Healthy circadian rhythms are important because they help regulate your body's internal clock. Because it operates on a 24-hour cycle, it's the reason you understand when it's time to start winding down for sleep and when you should start getting up. Your circadian rhythm is also responsible for you experiencing jet-lag because the shift from one timezone to another is a disruption of your body clock. In order for them to function properly, you need zeitgebers. In addition to being a really fun word to say, zeitgebers are rhythmically occurring natural phenomena that give your body external cues.

One of the most powerful zeitgebers is the sun, because it provides a context for your circadian rhythm's regulation. Other influential zeitgebers include cues like eating and sleeping at certain times, both of which train your body to adopt a standard of what is normal. These are some of the ways your body knows what timezone you're in and when you should do certain things; when you travel and experience jet-lag, zeitgebers like eating and sleeping are what re-aligns your body to your new time-zone's schedule. This in turn synchronizes your circadian rhythms and helps you experience more satisfying sleep. Consistently exposing yourself to powerful zeitgebers is crucial for maintaining healthy circadian rhythms and, in turn, for getting a good night's sleep.

Practice Good Sleep Hygiene

Good personal hygiene is pretty important to most of us (and if it's not important to you, you should rethink some of your life choices!) But what about good sleep hygiene? Most of us probably didn't even know there was a such thing, but in fact, it's vital for getting a healthy night's sleep! In this case, however, the term hygiene doesn't necessarily refer to having a "clean" sleep, but rather to the practice of controlling your environment and pre-bedtime behavior to optimize your sleep routine. So, what does that look like in practice? Well, the first step is preparing your bedroom.

Because light keeps you awake, your body needs total darkness to facilitate deep sleep. That's because your eyes are highly sensitive to darkness and when it starts getting dark, they send signals to your brain, telling it to produce the chemical melatonin which is responsible for making you feel sleepy. This process can be disrupted very quickly if your brain is exposed to even the smallest amount of light, and that's why it's a good idea to avoid watching TV in bed. Although many people love to fall asleep with the TV on (and I'll admit, it's very relaxing), it can actually cause long-term disruption to your sleep cycle and prevent you from getting the high-quality sleep you need. The same is sadly true of your phone, because it's so tempting to look at and because it's often the first thing we look at before falling asleep. Likewise, we're frequently tempted to check it if we wake up during the night, and these additional bursts of light only send more disruptive cues to our brains. For this reason, sleep experts advise sleeping with our phones off or in another room (even if we think we might die from being disconnected!).

So, in addition to removing visual distractions, it's also important to be comfortable in your bedroom. The mattress you choose can have a huge impact on the quality of your sleep, so take some time to think about the kind of mattress you prefer. If you find that your current one isn't working for you, it may be time to consider a replacement! You may also need to update the vibe of your bedroom. Because if the place where you sleep isn't

somewhere you would want to spend time while you're awake, it might also be a disruptive factor. So, think about what your room might need to become a place that's calming, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing. Maybe it's as simple as a few extra decorations or painting the room in a cheerful shade!

It can also be helpful to develop a sleep routine. You likely had one as a child-- a nightly schedule that incorporated dinner, a bath, and getting ready for bed-- and it probably helped you wind down for a peaceful night's sleep. But as adults, we tend to lose touch with these schedules in favor of pulling all-nighters to meet deadlines and other facets of adult life that keep us up way too late. So, what if we attempted to reclaim that schedule? By providing yourself with a restful structure of things to help you get ready for bed, you can help your body adjust to a healthy sleep routine. Starting off with a relaxing bath or reading in bed until you get sleepy can help!

What is Insomnia?

We've often heard insomnia referred to as a simple inability to sleep, but is that really the best way to define it? Based on what we've learned in our previous chapters, which demonstrate that people can actually die from lack of sleep, it's safe to say that, medically speaking, insomnia is not a perpetual inability to sleep. A more accurate way of phrasing it is to say that insomnia is a state of being irritated by an unsatisfactory level of sleep. Or, to put it simply, it's not that insomnia sufferers don't sleep, but rather that they don't get enough of the right kind of sleep. So, what does that mean in practice?

Well, although the first step in being diagnosed with insomnia is a pattern of experiencing bad sleep twice a week for a period of at least three months, this is something of an arbitrary standard. Because if you're troubled by poor sleep even twice a month, this can also be considered part of the criteria for insomnia. A more practical definition of insomnia can be found through examining its symptoms, beginning with the first sign: an inability to get sleep when you want to sleep. This could be manifested through what is called sleep-onset insomnia-- or not being able to fall asleep even when you feel sleepy-- or sleep-maintenance insomnia, which is the inability to stay asleep through the whole night. As you might imagine, this poor standard of sleep would leave anybody feeling irritable and this manifestation of annoyance is another symptom that's considered a hallmark of insomnia.

So, what causes this condition? Why aren't we able to do something that should be easy? Doctors theorize that it's caused by anxiety or can be triggered by other medical conditions, both of which can keep people in an agitated and constantly alert state which deters sleep. The good news, however, is that it can be overcome through learning about sleep and having a doctor's help in formulating a sleep plan that works for you. So, if you're struggling with insomnia, you're not doomed, and you don't need to turn to sleeping pills, as we'll discuss in the next chapter.

Sleeping Pills Are Not the Answer

The advances in medicine today are amazing. We can draw tremendous relief from the fact that, for almost any problem we experience, there's some form of medicine that can help us get well. However, the accessibility of medical solutions can sometimes lead to an overreliance on pills, even when they might not be the most helpful solution for us. And the same is true of sleeping pills. If you're worried about your lack of sleep and aware of the health issues unsatisfactory sleep can cause, taking a pill to help you sleep may sound like the perfect fix.

This might sound especially beneficial if you've heard that lack of sleep can make you obese. And, wacky as it seems, it's true! A 2015 study which was published in the academic journal *Sleep* discovered that the hunger hormone ghrelin was more active in people who get less than six hours of sleep a night, making them more likely to overeat. So, if you're really anxious to get ahead of potential weight gain, you might be tempted to simply pop a pill. However, sleeping pills aren't just a poor long-term solution, they're not a great solution for any time! That's because they provide you with only marginal benefits and add some significant issues of their own. For example, although they extend your average night's sleep by only a minute fraction, they actually reduce your ability to get enough deep sleep to actually feel rested.

So, as you can see, sleeping pills are not the one-size-fits-all sleep fix you might have assumed and you shouldn't take them unless they're prescribed by your doctor as part of a carefully orchestrated sleep plan. It's also important that you get specific information from your doctor about how long you should take them, when you should take them, and when it's best to stop.

Cultivate a Consistent Sleep Schedule

Getting your body on a consistent sleep schedule is a much better alternative to sleeping pills. Though we've already discussed the importance of giving yourself a healthy bedtime routine in our earlier chapters, this is a little different because it concentrates on actively scheduling your sleep. So, what is a sleep schedule and why is it important? The primary reason is that getting up and going to bed at the same time every day is crucial for successful sleep. Because the alternative is letting your sleep control your schedule and, in turn, control your life. And is that really what we want for our lives? The great news is that if we take control of our sleep schedule, we not only optimize our quality of sleep, we minimize the fatigue we'll experience in daily life as well as the effects of the occasional rough night.

So, to get started, first pick a wake-up time that works for you. Make sure it fits around your work schedule and other responsibilities, as setting an optimum wake-up time of 10:00 am isn't awesome if you're meant to be in the office by 8:00. You should also try to set your wake-up time so that you can enjoy a relaxing shower or a nice breakfast if you feel that these are important ways to start your day. You can determine your prime wake-up time by counting five-and-a-half hours backwards from that time to determine when you'd need to go to sleep. For example, if your wake-up time is 6:30, that would put you going to sleep at 1:00 am. If that doesn't sound like a great sleep schedule, then adjust either your bedtime or wake-up time accordingly. You can keep adjusting until you feel you've stopped experiencing sleepiness through the day.

Most people need between six and eight hours of sleep a day to function properly, so play around with your schedule until you've determined exactly what feels right to you. Although creating and maintaining a sleep schedule can be difficult, it's one of the most beneficial things you can ever do. In fact, getting the right amount of sleep could even save your life!

Final Summary

Getting proper sleep is crucial for living a healthy life. Without sleep, people can die, and failure to get an appropriate amount of deep, restful sleep can drastically reduce your health, productivity, and quality of life. That's why it's important to take steps to improve your sleep, like adjusting your circadian rhythms, practicing good sleep hygiene, and developing a sleep schedule.



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