

Sleep

If we don't get our sleep right, nothing works right. Especially for those of us living with chronic conditions, sleep can be something we REALLY struggle with - and the poor quality of our sleep detrimentally affects the rest of our health challenges. Setting ourselves up for our best health requires us to learn to sleep better.

I went through years of insomnia, inability to stay asleep, pain interrupting my sleep, poor quality sleep, waking up feeling like I'd been hit by a bus, and an improper sleep diagnosis that ignored the root issues and delayed progress. Finally, at 33 years old, I started to experience restorative sleep for the first time in my life - and WOAHH, what a difference it makes!

The one resource that I believe is applicable to every human on the planet is The Huberman Lab podcast, hosted by Stanford neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Huberman. I recommend starting at the beginning, and working your way toward the current episodes, because the first set of episodes are entirely about how to optimize sleep using practical, science-grounded tips. Many of the recommendations listed below are tips I learned from The Huberman Lab podcast.

Sleep Tips

View sunlight by going outside within 30-60 minutes of waking and again in the late afternoon, prior to or at sunset.

- If you wake up before the sun is out and you *want* to be awake, turn on bright artificial lights and then go outside once the sun rises.
- On bright, cloudless days: view morning and afternoon sun for 10 min; cloudy days: 20 min; very overcast days 30-60 min. If you live someplace with very minimal light, consider an artificial daytime simulator source. We use the [Verilux HappyLight Lamp](#).
- Don't wear sunglasses or a brimmed hat for this practice if you safely can. Contact lenses and eyeglasses are fine.
- Don't look directly at the sun, and don't look at ANY light so bright that it is painful to view!

View bright lights (sunlight and artificial) throughout the day, and don't wear blue-blocking glasses during the day.

- Blue light is important for waking up and setting the circadian rhythm.

Wake up at the same time each day and go to sleep when you first start to feel sleepy.

- Pushing through the sleepy late evening feeling and going to sleep too late (for you) is one reason people wake at 3 am and can't fall back asleep.

Avoid caffeine within 8-10 hours of bedtime.

- Dr. Matt Walker (sleep expert from UC Berkeley) might even say 12-14 hours. Dr. Walker was on the [Huberman Lab Podcast](#).
- I have a genetic mutation that allows me to metabolize caffeine very quickly, so caffeine doesn't affect me. But if my husband has even a little bit of chocolate after 11am, the caffeine keeps him awake and buzzing way past our desired bedtime.

If you have sleep disturbances, insomnia, or anxiety about sleep, try hypnosis.

- Dr. Huberman recommends people use the research-supported protocols on the [Reveri app](#) (for iPhone), which is designed by medical hypnosis clinician and researcher Dr. David Spiegel. Dr. Huberman recommends doing the Reveri sleep self-hypnosis 3x a week at any time of day. It's only 10-15 min long and will help you rewire your nervous system to be able to relax faster.
- My husband and I work with Dr. Marc Schoen, PhD who is an expert in mind-body medicine and he has provided us with personalized hypnosis recordings that have been miraculous in helping us to calm our minds and bodies – day and night – and to fall and stay asleep.

Avoid viewing bright lights—especially bright overhead lights between 10 pm and 4 am.

- Only use as much artificial lighting as is necessary for you to remain and move about safely at night. Blue blockers can help a bit at night but it's still important to dim the lights. Viewing bright lights of all colors are a problem for your circadian system. Candlelight and moonlight are fine. (Shift workers should reference the [Huberman Lab Podcast on jetlag](#) for offsetting shift work negative effects. Same for jetlagged travelers.)
- We start turning off and dimming lights around our house around 7pm.
- We have amber lightbulbs and nightlights throughout the house and salt lamps that we love using when we need light at night.

Train yourself to be a nose breather instead of a mouth breather.

- Nasal breathing is very important for respiration during sleep (and during the day). Consider taping your mouth closed at night using medical paper tape. Read more about the importance of mouth breathing for sleep [here](#).

Consider working with a health practitioner to assess whether you might benefit from taking supplements to help realign any out of balance adrenal hormones.

- Discovering that my cortisol and melatonin levels were backwards (my cortisol was highest at night and my melatonin was highest in the morning) explained so much about my challenge with sleep and wakefulness for most of my life. Taking supplements that helped to realign my hormones made an enormous difference with starting to get my sleep on track.

Consider working with a health practitioner to determine whether Low-Dose Naltrexone (LDN) may be a good option for you.

- LDN has allowed me to get restorative sleep for the first time in my life.

If you wake up in the middle of the night (which is normal to do once or so each night) but you can't fall back asleep, consider doing an Non-Sleep Deep Rest (NSDR) protocol or hypnosis.

- Enter "[NSDR](#)" into YouTube and the top 3-4 options have different voices, durations for you to select from. Or simply do a "Yoga Nidra" protocol (enter "[yoga nidra](#)" to YouTube or on [Insight Timer](#)).
- Use the Reveri hypnosis app, or find a medical hypnosis practitioner to work with and provide you with a recording.

Develop a calming nighttime routine.

- Routines may include taking a warm shower or bath, reading a book, gentle stretching, meditation, hypnosis, breathwork, journaling, etc.

Stop eating at least 3 hours before bedtime.

- The digestion process interrupts your sleep.

Expect to feel really alert ~1 hour before your natural bedtime.

- This is a naturally occurring spike in wakefulness that sleep researchers have observed. It will pass!

Keep the room you sleep in cool and dark and layer on blankets that you can remove.

- Your body needs to drop in temperature by 1-3 degrees to fall and stay asleep effectively. Body temperature increases are one reason you wake up.

Don't drink alcohol. Be careful with sleep medications.

- Alcohol and most sleep medications mess up your sleep. Listen to the [Huberman Lab Podcast Episode with Dr. Matt Walker](#) to learn more.

Limit daytime naps to less than 90 min, or don't nap at all.