

Happy Hormones
FOR LIFE



SLEEP GUIDE



Sleep problems are at an epidemic level. Over 10 million prescriptions for sleeping pills are issued each year. And changing hormones make women over 40 particularly susceptible.

Whether you have a problem falling asleep initially, or you have early hours insomnia where you wake up at 3 or 4am and lie awake – if you're not getting enough good quality sleep, it's going to affect your health. And it's not just your energy levels and mood that suffer, lack of sleep is a serious long term health risk that needs to get sorted.

You can have the best diet in the world and be super fit, but if you're not sleeping well enough, forget it! That's why Sleep is part of **Step 2** of my Happy Hormone Code.

Why is it so important?

Imagine your body is like a high performance electric racing car. It races around the track all day long, and it may pick up a few bumps and scrapes along the way. In order to get the best performance from that car every single day, it needs to go into the repair shop each night to get re-charged, fine tuned, cleaned and repaired.

Your body is a lot more complex than a fast car. And it needs a lot more maintenance! Sleep is when the body does it's vital repairing, restoring and cleaning.

And how we sleep has a huge impact on our **hormones**.

According to research, lack of sleep has been shown to **increase weight gain and fatigue** by:

- impairing insulin function (making us more prone to storing fat)
- increasing levels of ghrelin hormone (responsible for increasing appetite signals!)
- lowering leptin hormone (responsible for suppressing appetite signals!)
- increasing cortisol (which likes to store fat around the middle)
- reducing fat burning capability

On top of that, poor sleep has been associated with:

- Depression and anxiety
- Cognitive decline
- Weakened immunity
- Inflammation
- Reduced lifespan

Not good news! So we have to improve our sleep quality if we are going to be healthy and lower our risk of hormone imbalance and long term chronic disease.

Why do we have sleep issues?

- **Stress** – cortisol is your stress hormone, but also your ‘wake up’ hormone. It is secreted first thing in the morning to get you up and out of bed. Then it is supposed to gradually drop during the day and be at its lowest level in the evening so that your body can relax and sleep. This is your natural Circadian rhythm. If you have excess cortisol running around your system from too much stress, your natural rhythm is going to be knocked off course and your sleep disrupted.
- **Poor diet** – a high carb/sugar diet is a major factor in sleep issues. When you’re on a blood sugar roller coaster, it can be very stressful for your body. Blood sugar dips (hypoglycemia) stimulate cortisol release, which can wake us up if it happens during the night.
- **Too many stimulants** during the day – coffee, tea, chocolate, fizzy drinks and alcohol can all affect our sleep patterns.
- **Lack of melatonin**, your sleep hormone – in order to sleep your body produces a hormone called melatonin, which is made by converting serotonin. Artificial light can get in the way of this process; computer lights, street lights, alarm clocks, mobile phones, TV light, etc.
- **Peri-menopause** – fluctuating oestrogen can cause night sweats that can disturb sleep. Progesterone is your anti-stress hormone, promoting relaxation and sleep. Low levels during peri-menopause and beyond can increase sleep issues.

Sleep Tips

The biggest difference I see in clinic is when you reduce your daytime stress. This has a huge impact on cortisol balance, which I believe is the main reason for poor sleep. So please read the **Stress Management** guide for more information on that.

In the meantime, here are my top tips for a good night’s sleep:

1. Make sure the room is **totally dark** – artificial light (especially the blue light from electronics) interferes with your production of melatonin, the sleep hormone. Get some black out blinds and cover any electronic lights from your alarm clock, phone, TV or laptop. If for any reason you can’t get rid of all light, then use an eye mask. If you have to use your laptop, tablet or phone, try wearing blue light blocking glasses like Blublockers.
2. Go to bed **earlier** – research has shown that the hours before midnight are more restorative. During sleep we have several cycles of REM and deeper non-REM sleep. Between 11pm and 3am, we have more cycles of deeper non REM sleep, and that is when the body does more of its repair work. So try to get to bed before 11pm every night.

3. Get off the **gadgets**! Your brain will be over stimulated and it will be hard to switch off. And try not to keep them in your bedroom overnight. If left on, the electromagnetic frequencies they emit can interfere with your melatonin production.
4. Balance your **blood sugar** – avoid quick release carbohydrates (eg white bread, potatoes, sugar, processed foods) which put you on the blood sugar roller coaster. Some people do well on eating at least 3 hours before bed. Others do well on having a small low GL snack just before bed (like some nuts or a glass of milk).
5. Limit your **caffeine** – I love my coffee, but I can't drink it after lunch time without it affecting my sleep. We all have different tolerance levels to caffeine, and as we age our tolerance can decrease. For some people, it can take longer for caffeine to clear from the body, so try decaf for a week and see what happens with your sleep. Caffeine is also a diuretic so you may find you don't have to get up at night if you eliminate it.
6. **Exercise** – being physically tired can result in more relaxing sleep at night.
7. **Magnesium** is the calming mineral – essential for relaxing nerves and muscles. Try an Epsom Salts bath before bed (1 cup poured into warm water) for about 20 mins. Rich in Magnesium Sulphate, your skin will absorb what you need.
8. **Herbal teas** – try a calming herbal tea before bed. There are many night time formulas out there. Yogi Tea Bedtime and Pukka Night time are two of my favourites.
9. **Calm your mind** – going over and over things that have happened or are planned in the future can stop anyone sleeping. Best to write it all down to get it out of your head. Try a relaxation or meditation App or CD.
10. **No news** – watching the news or a scary film before bed is going to stress you out, so try to avoid.
11. Avoid **alcohol** 4-6 hours before bed – great for getting you off to sleep initially, but as alcohol wears off it has a stimulatory effect at about 3am! It may be hard to get back to sleep afterwards.

Further reading;

[Fast Asleep:Wide Awake](#), by Dr Nerina Ramlakhan

[The Sleep Revolution](#) by Arianna Huffington

SWEET DREAMS!