

The Building Blocks Of Happiness



With Erica Terblanche on the Lundi Khoisan show
on Mix FM 93.8

Tune in every Wednesday at 10h10 for your weekly
soundbite of scientifically validated, practical happiness
coaching and learn one new happiness habit every week.

Sleep

This is again a huge topic and we will therefore spend three weeks on it. My invitation to you is to use these three weeks to improve and raise the standard of your sleep. Each week there will be homework, to help you improve step by step.

There are three parts:

Week 1 - **WHY DO WE SLEEP AND WHAT DOES GOOD SLEEP LOOK LIKE?**

Week 2 - **SLEEP HYGIENE - THE THINGS THAT HELP US AND PREVENT US FROM SLEEPING**

Week 3 - **SHIFTING UNHELPFUL SLEEPING PATTERNS TO MORE HELPFUL ONES**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DON'T SLEEP ENOUGH?

The science is clear – we need to sleep enough to be healthy and mentally well. The quality of our sleep impacts our mental health, our appetite, our physical health and our performance.



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Sufficient sleep aids weight loss, our memory function, and physical growth and repair, and it is a vital need as much as food, water and air. Rats deprived of sleep and food die at the same rate. Some research studies have shown that missing one to two hours of sleep a night has the same impact on our mental performance as having enough units of alcohol that bring one to just below the driving limit. Chronic sleep deprivation has been linked to depression, increased stress, lower ability to regulate mood, lower drive and motivation, increased appetite, lower skin collagen (and more wrinkles) and lowered sex drive to name a few. But just basically - life sucks if you are tired and there is a brightness and Joie de vie that comes when you feel rested which is both highly functional, healthy, and attractive. Sleep makes you smarter and more beautiful.

BUT WHAT DOES GOOD SLEEP LOOK LIKE?

The stats of the sleep foundation show that 25% of American adults get insufficient sleep for at least 15 out of 30 days. And almost 70% say they have at least one bad night a month. 11% that is every night for them.

WHAT IS ENOUGH SLEEP?

The issue here is two-fold – how long we sleep and the quality of our sleep.

DURATION

For adults between 17-64 years the experts say anywhere between 7-9 hours is adequate. A little more for teenagers and even more for kids and a little less for people over 64 years.

QUALITY

Many people get stressed because they don't fall asleep immediately or if they wake during the night.

The truth is that it takes 10-15 minutes to fall asleep. If you drop off the moment your head hits the pillow – you may very likely be sleep deprived.

AND it is absolutely normal to wake up during the night. The issue is what do you do when you wake up?

Ok, let's look at what a normal healthy adult sleep cycle looks like.

NORMAL CYCLES OF SLEEP

Humans sleep in cycles of approximately 90 mins – and each cycle has four stages:

Light sleep.

Deeper sleep.

Then into the deepest sleep, where most growth takes place.

Lastly, REM sleep - we do all of our dreaming there.

Brief waking and very light sleep and then back down into deeper sleep and so on...

It is normal to wake up at 3am! In the 1700s people slept in two tranches. Then woke up fully in the middle to work, socialise, love. So don't worry if you wake at night. It's about what you do when you wake up. We will get to that in week 2.

SO WHAT DOES GOOD SLEEP LOOK LIKE?

- 7-9 hrs - athletes maybe a bit more - underlying health conditions maybe even more.
- Falling asleep somewhere between 10-15 minutes.
- It is normal to go in and out of deep sleep in these cycles.
- It is also normal that our dream cycles gets longer, the longer we sleep - that's why we often have our most vivid dreaming in the mornings.

The first secret to good sleep is having a regular cycle - the same time to bed and the same time up - even on weekends. It trains the body and embeds a circadian rhythm which one's hormones then obediently follow, secreting melatonin etc at the right times...

The next secret is to have a relaxing bed-time ritual to signal to the body – like dinner bells to Pavlov's dog - that sleep time is near...

BASE LINING

Right, let's do this - let's baseline your sleep!

- How many hours do you sleep?
- Do you easily fall asleep again if you woke up in the middle of the night?
- How refreshed do you feel in the morning?
- Regular bedtime and waking or is it irregular?
- Do you have a powerful bedtime ritual?

HOMEWORK

This week try at least for most nights to go to bed and wake at the same time AND TO IMPROVE

YOUR PRE-BED RITUAL

- Dim your lights an hour before bed and get off your screen and your phone - ideally two hours before bed if you can and do something else instead - bath by candle light, read, listen to a meditation. Journal.

I encourage you to try it this week.

Nwxt week we cover sleep hygiene!

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Sleep Hygiene

Last week we spoke about what good sleep looks like and why it is so important for a happy and productive life. Sleep is important for optimal cognitive functioning and mental health. And we know that too little sleep is related to increased levels of depression, weight gain, and losses in skin collagen.

Good sleep for adults is between 7-9 hours, falling asleep more or less within 15 minutes, and it is normal to wake in the night as we go through the cycles of lighter, deeper, and dream sleep.

Many people report that they don't sleep well but I think often what people call 'sleep problems' are actually sleep HYGIENE problems.

Today we will look at the things that help us and prevents us from sleeping.

SLEEP HYGIENE - what are the basics for good sleep and what prevents us from it? We can talk about this one for hours. But let's look at the five biggest sleep hygiene culprits that prevent us from a good night's rest.



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ALCOHOL

- Sadly yes. That glass of wine even as much as five hours before bed does not help you to sleep well. The feeling of more easily dropping off to sleep is actually closer to sedation than falling asleep. Alcohol typically represses REM sleep in the first two cycles of the night which significantly reduces sleep quality. Insomnia is a very common condition among people who drink moderate to high amounts of alcohol (more than one glass a night for women and two glasses for the gents).

The same is true of marijuana. Chamomile tea is a proven sleep enhancer. And it doesn't leave you with any hangover either.

LIGHT

- Our bodies have natural circadian rhythms of waking and sleeping and light is a powerful regulator of the body's circadian function.

Try to get an hour of sunlight a day – especially in the morning before 10 am so that it can kick off your body clock.

At night- two hours before sleep – begin to dim the ambient light so to get your body into its natural sleep state.

There is also research that suggests that the blue light emissions from our computer screens and mobile phones interfere with our melatonin production which helps our bodies to sleep. A free software www.f.lux.com provides screen dimmers that one can set to kick in say at 8 pm. Also, try not to let your bedroom look like a space station of flickering lights and chargers. Cover them and switch off what you don't need.

I can attest that my best and highest quality nights of sleep are in the wilderness – where there is no light pollution – even if I am sleeping on a paper-thin mattress and with my shoes as the only pillow.

In the city, many people use black-out blinds and eye masks.

• **TEMPERATURE**

So nobody wants to go to bed with cold feet and often the upshot of this is that we overheat our bedrooms and our beds. Your bedroom should be between 16-18 degrees if possible and with decent ventilation. During the night our bodies need to be cool to sleep at our best.

By the same token – when we begin to enter the waking cycle our body temperatures rise. So use this powerful mechanism to help you if you are struggling to wake up. When you hit the snooze button, pile on an extra blanket or duvet and let your body heat up. You will feel how it prompts the body into wakefulness.

• **NOISE**

All I can say here is to get good ear plugs.

And take them everywhere with you.

And if your partner snores – consider sleeping head to toe – and keep your love alive.

Sometimes if my neighbours are having a party and I need to go to bed early for some reason I use a normal old wind fan to make white noise. It really helps.

• **MAGNESIUM DEFICIENCY**

It is estimated that 75% of the industrialised world is magnesium deficient which raises havoc with sleep quality. An eminent sleep doctor in the US declared that she lost almost 70% of her patients after the first consultation during which she would routinely prescribe a high-quality magnesium supplement. It is estimated that South Africans are on average getting only half their daily RDA of magnesium.

Foods rich in magnesium are pumpkin seeds, almonds, and spinach.

Of course, there are many more reasons why people don't sleep well – mosquitoes, chronic pain, allergies and itching, broken ribs, menopause, or newborn babies. Wherever possible try to find ways to deal with these circumstances. Don't just accept that poor sleep is your fate.

THERE ARE THINGS THAT WE CAN DO THAT CAN AID OUR SLEEP.

1. Tryptophan in turkey, yogurt, almonds, and chicken – stimulates melatonin production
2. Sleep meditation – Pradra Nidra
3. Having a regular evening ritual
4. And if you can't fall asleep after 20 mins – get up, go write down your list or listen to a podcast or have a hot shower, and try again.

HOMEWORK

IMPROVE ONE HYGIENE THING

What is the biggest hygiene problem? Alcohol? Too much light? Too warm in your bedroom?
Drinking too much water late at night?

Next week we are going to talk about the emergency procedures when sleep won't come and learn one or two foolproof tricks to help us go to Lala-Land.

- Napping
- The 16-hour bus
- GOING OVER THE ALPHA BRIDGE
- Sleep restriction – yes, this one is controversial

Until then - sleep well.

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Sleep

Last week we spoke about sleep hygiene and getting the basics right to support ourselves in waking and sleeping for optimal well-being.

Ok, so this week we are going to learn two simple techniques to help us when sleep won't come.

Just before we get there I want to just say to our listeners that there are two things we didn't cover last week.

- The first is that if you find yourself lying awake and unable to fall asleep and unable to rest into the wakeful relaxation – in other words, if your bed has become a place of anxiety and doing battle with yourself, then rather get up. Make a list of what it is that is bothering you – your to do list for tomorrow or the things you need to tell your boss/ kids/ spouse. Listen to a podcast or read a few pages from your book. Then go back to bed. Sleep experts believe that it is better to do this and reset than to toss and turn until 3am.



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- The second thing is to use napping if you have had a bad night's sleep and you need to be on top form despite the grogginess of sleep deprivation. The secret to good napping is to not nap too long. In fact 10-15 or at most 20 minutes before you drop down from light into deeper and deep sleep. When one naps into the deeper cycles of sleep, one wakes groggy and unsettled rather than refreshed. I think progressive businesses and schools should have nap rooms that enable tired employees, teachers, students, and nurses to get a 10-15 minute nap boost. I never used to nap, but now when I feel tired and frayed, and especially if the pressure is on to deliver, I have a 15-minute crash nap – and it really resets me – rather than try and push through with coffee and chocolate. Also, get out into the sun. It helps a lot to drive away drowsiness.

Let's get into the techniques.

The first one is one of my favourites – it is the 16-hour sleepy bus.

- How it works is that we all have a circadian rhythm and a stretch of wakefulness that lasts about 16 hours and then a stretch of sleeping for 8 hours – more or less. Think of it as a battery cell with 16 hours of power in it. Nearing the end of our 16-hour day, the battery runs out. And that is when you get that delicious sleepy and drowsy feeling. The issue is that you have about 15 minutes to get onto that sleepy bus to lala-land before it leaves. If you don't, the body registers that something is going on and that there is an out-of-rhythm emergency and secretes a jolt of cortisol and adrenaline – which of course gives you that second wind that will last about two hours. This is a disaster for falling asleep.
- Let's work it out – if you got up this morning at 6 am, your battery will run out at about 10 pm. So at 9 pm, start getting ready and make sure that when the sleepy bus arrives you are ready, in your pj's, in your bed, teeth brushed, and your phone already on airplane mode an hour ago so that you can hop on the bus when it comes – effortlessly.

Many of us make this mistake of missing our sleepiness bus – just one more email or one more social media scroll or whatever – and we push through the sleepiness that comes at the natural end of our circadian day and then we can't sleep. So, make sure you are ready and waiting at the bus stop!

- Life-hack: I find for my racing it is really useful to understand how this rhythm works so I can actually manipulate it when I need to shift to a much earlier waking time. So, say I need to wake up at 4 am on race day on Saturday, I make sure that I get up at 4 am on Friday morning (even if it's hard) so I am tired enough to fall asleep at 8 pm on Fri night.
- Do you see how that works – it's not about going to bed earlier and tossing and turning there until your battery runs out. It is actually about getting up earlier the day before so that you can fall asleep early enough and get up early and refreshed on the day that it matters.

The second technique is one of my all-time favourites and I find it extremely simple, effective, and teachable.

- It is called **THE ALPHA BRIDGE MEDITATION** – most useful for helping us to fall asleep and re-enter sleep when we battle to after waking in the middle of the night.

Here is the recipe:

• Lie comfortably

- Close your eyes and count to 30 – just at your own pace – count to 30

- Now open your eyes – BUT ONLY HALFWAY – for five counts

- Close your eyes and count to 30 – at your own pace

- Now open your eyes – BUT THIS TIME ONLY A QUARTER OF THE WAY – for five counts

- Close your eyes and follow your breath – the inhalation, the exhalation

Many people drop off before they get into the final stages – many people have to repeat the cycle twice or even thrice. But most often sleep comes.

Here is how and why it works:

- Firstly, counting is a way to refocus our minds and cut out the repeat loop of incessant thought that keeps us anxious, alert, and awake. It also helps the brain waves to slow down from alpha in our waking state to beta in our early sleep cycles – that's why it is called 'going over the alpha bridge'.
- Secondly, as we count, the pace of our counting naturally slows down and with it, our breathing regulates, slows down, and deepens
- Thirdly, by forcing the person to open the eyes, which at this point the person does not really feel like doing, we invoke a process of ironic processing where we invert the resistance – we no longer resist sleeping, we resist the instruction to open our eyes and stay awake.
- And then we repeat this loop to deepen the experience and carry the sleeper off into white space free of thought, stress, and struggle.

It is a beautiful practice – and it works.

Count to 30- open the eyes halfway for 5 – close and count to 30 – open the eyes a quarter way – close and follow the breath.

Your homework this week is twofold – work out your 16-hour timetable and get ready in time to catch the bus.

And tonight – just try it – going over the alpha bridge and make it a practice that is your own and will serve you for life.

And with that, we conclude the **SLEEP** module.

Next week we will talk about my absolute favourite topic, the one thing that changed my life more than anything else I have ever done...

EXERCISE!

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