



## **Getting Enough Shut-eye?**

With today's faster paced lifestyles the majority of the human race opts for work AND play, sacrificing sleep in the process. But did you know that a lack of sleep can damage your health in a multitude of ways? Most studies show that around 7-8 hours of sleep each night is sufficient, but if you are one who tends to push the boundaries and survive on as little as 5 hours per night then the consequences could lead to impaired speech, memory, reaction time, recovery and flexible thinking. On the flip side, if you tend to be a bit on the lazy side and over do the sleep, this also can have undesirable side effects.

In athletes, a lack of sleep usually means a lack of recovery between intense training sessions, resulting in sore muscles & stiffness as well as having a detrimental effect on the poundage lifted and cardiovascular performance. During the deep stage of sleep the body receives almost all of its daily dosage of human growth hormone (HGH). HGH aids in muscle repair and recovery while we sleep, helping the body to recuperate between sessions. If there is broken sleep then the body cannot get its supply of HGH, meaning the possibility of weakened muscle tissue and the body not firing on all cylinders. On reaching a plateau in training an athlete will automatically up their game in order to push through to the next level, but if this happens at a time when the body is not getting sufficient rest then this could lead to over training syndrome, in the worst case scenario, leading to Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME – Chronic Fatigue Syndrome), which is difficult for athletes to recover from. Another damaging disease which may occur in extreme cases is 'Addison's Disease' – the permanent reduced function of the adrenal gland, no longer enabling the gland to maintain proper hormone levels, usually ending the elite athlete's career.

Sleep is also important for the brain to process & file all the information it has received that day. Mental functioning decreases far quicker than physical which can effect crucial decisions made during events.

Anxiety can be a big factor in athletes losing sleep prior to a competition or big event, the pre race tension and release of adrenalin being the likely cause. Even if you have the perfect nutrition and training program, without adequate rest your body will not recover fully. An increase in your training intensity must be coupled with an increase in your rest. This balance can increase the body's immunity. If you train twice a day then time could be made for a nap (30-60 minutes) after the first session to recharge the batteries, however some experts do say that napping involves REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which can leave you feeling lethargic, demotivated and moody. Naps are usually a way of your body trying to tell you that it didn't get a sufficient nights rest.

Hormonal problems in women such as pre-menstrual tension, pregnancy & menopause are also known to interfere with sleeping patterns.

### **Am I Getting Enough Sleep?**

The amount of sleep each individual requires can differ considerably. If you tend to suffer from some of the following then you probably aren't getting sufficient sleep: Often fall asleep throughout the day – once awake, you still feel tired – feel slow or lethargic during the day – usually need an alarm clock to wake you – sleep longer through times of depression or anxiety – athletic performance declining



### **How to Ensure Quality Sleep**

Initially you should try to stabilize your sleep patterns for one week aiming for about 10 hours sleep. Then when this is established you should continue with the 10 hours sleep without the aid of an alarm clock to wake you. Make a record of each nights sleep time to establish an average, and this should then provide you with an approx average of your genetic sleep needs. Then follow these simple guidelines:

1. Avoid drinking tea, coffee, coke (caffeine) in the evening as caffeine is a stimulant and will keep you awake.
2. Do not go to bed unless you feel sleepy. Tossing and turning will only make you agitated, making it even more difficult to get off to sleep.
3. Try to go to bed and wake at the same time to create a routine.
4. Adopt a relaxing pre-bedtime habit. E.g. reading or listening to soft music.
5. Avoid heavy meals prior to bedtime. Eat a light snack 1 hr before to prevent the rumbly belly keeping you awake.
6. Make your bedroom ideal for sleeping – dark, quiet, cool, quality bedding etc
7. Avoid alcohol, as although this may make you drowsy it will also usually be the culprit to wake you in the early hours.
8. Training & exercise improves sleep but avoid any form of training late at night, the adrenalin produced will keep you feeling way too active to sleep.
9. Having sex – the elevating and lowering of body temperature and the release of relaxing endorphins will send you off to sleep