

# The Links Between Wellbeing and A Good Night's Sleep

by Sandie Dennis



## BeyondEAP

Specialist employee support  
for life's toughest challenges

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“They’re not getting enough sleep.”



## The Links Between Wellbeing and A Good Night’s Sleep

In my role as an employee support coach, there is one recurring issue that employees talk to me about over and over again.

### They’re not getting enough sleep.

Perhaps fortunately, it’s a problem I understand very well. I have been plagued with sleep issues since childhood; an area that I believe has contributed to the bouts of depression that I experienced earlier in my life.

And so, I’ve made it a personal mission to conquer my sleep issues, once and for all. I have even recently embarked on a Neuroscience course, to gain personal understanding and to share the most up-to-date research within this eBook, along with my best tips towards a great night’s sleep.

I hope they work as well for you as they have for me, and many of my clients.



# Why Do We Sleep?

We sleep for a third of our lives. Yet it's only over the past five years that research has revealed some of the major vital brain functionalities of a good night's slumber.

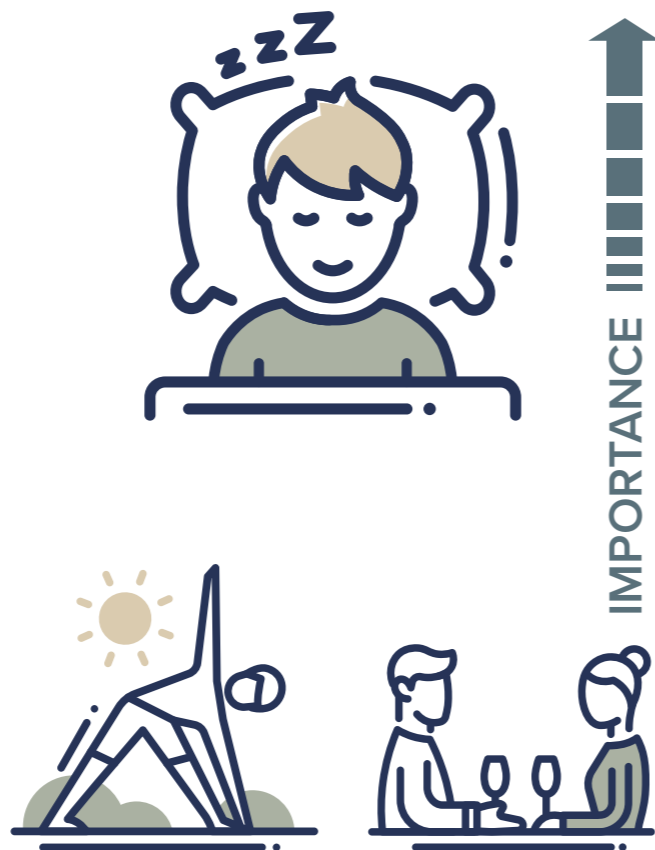
In 2015, there was a major discovery in sleep science; a new area in the brain called the glymphatic system. Over the last few years, it has also come to light that within this system is a fluid called beta-amyloid, which flushes out toxic metabolic waste from the brain whilst we sleep.

**In other words, sleep acts as a 'sewage system' for the brain.**

Research has found that when this fluid cycle is interrupted by inadequate or poor-quality sleep, it doesn't provide its full function of 'house-clearing'. This is now shown to be a key indicator of developing unhealthy brain ageing, and ultimately, Alzheimer's disease.

**This means it has never been as important to place quality sleep above even diet, nutrition, and exercise.**

Sleep also has been shown to maintain and restock our physiological housekeeping (such as growth hormones and immune cells), along with learning and brain development.



Studies show that sleeping after learning helps us to process the new knowledge, and retain it into the following day.

Other sleep studies reveal that good quality sleep moves memories from the short-term storage space of the hippocampus, to the long-term storage of the cortex.

The hippocampus could be said to act as a 'USB stick' for waking experiences, that then downloads into the cortex when we sleep.

In doing so, our waking experiences consolidate to strengthen our memories and solve problems, freeing the hippocampus for the following day.

**So, when we fall asleep, our brains move from recording to editing mode.**



# The Health Consequences of Poor Sleep

Nothing is more detrimental to our health than a continuous lack of sleep.

Sleep affects every one of our major organs, systems and brain processes. It is the foundation that everything else is built upon.

For starters, poor sleep impacts our mood, feelings and emotions, stress regulation and negative behaviour. It also impacts our attention and memory, and affects us physically by reducing immunity, preventing injury recovery, and increasing the risk of developing cancer, cardiovascular disease

and diabetes.

Another alarming study has even shown that poor-quality sleep can encourage existing cancers to spread to other locations of the body and metastasize.

Poor sleep also disrupts neurotransmitter release, for example; serotonin, oxytocin and dopamine, all of which contribute to psychiatric conditions including depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

**Disrupted sleep increases all causes of death, from accidents to illness.**

## Why Sleep Is a Magic Wellness Ingredient

It's amazing to think that just 7-9 hours of good quality sleep each night can do us so much good.

Sleep elevates our mood, so we feel happier and less stressed, and it also strengthens the memory.

**We can concentrate harder, think more clearly, and make better decisions when we've had a good night's rest.**

Good sleep also makes the gut nice and happy, strengthening the microbiome so that we can properly absorb the nutrients from the foods we eat.

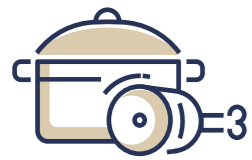




## My Ten Best Tips for Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Over the years, I have learned that sleep is something I need to take seriously, if I want to maintain my overall health and wellbeing.

I have now created a regular night-time routine encompassing these tips, which I also share regularly with clients.



### 1. Eat 2-3 hours before going to bed

Eating later at night means your body will focus on digestion. Research shows that eating within a 12:12 window, (a twelve-hour gap between the last meal of the night and breakfast) induces better sleep.



### 2. Stick to a sleep schedule

Try and have a regular bedtime and wake-up time, even at weekends. This is all based around circadian rhythms, which have an impact on the quality of sleep.

You might find it helpful to set an alarm to start the wind-down process before going to bed.



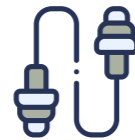
### 3. Make your bedroom a cave

In other words, it should be cool and dark.

A cool room will lower body temperature, and is a strong signal to the hypothalamus to indicate sleep. The recommended temperature is eighteen degrees.

Read outside of the bedroom, and if you have a TV in there, ditch it – otherwise the temptation to squeeze in ‘just one more episode’ of the latest Netflix box-set sensation may prove too strong.

Other electrical devices, LED lights and ‘blue light’ tablets also delay the melatonin reaction, affecting how quickly you can sleep.



### 4. Use earplugs if you need to

Earplugs have turned out to be a lifesaver for me. I’m even looking into having a personal ear cast made, which could be useful if you find traditional plugs fall out of your ears during the night.



### 5. Avoid over-stimulation before bedtime

Don’t exercise, or work on your laptop (or chat on the phone!) in the hours leading up to your bedtime. This sounds so obvious, but it works.

Also try to avoid dietary stimulants, including caffeine, chocolate, nicotine, and alcohol, as they will disrupt your sleep.



### 6. Calm your mind

Relaxing pre-sleep techniques include a warm bath, breathing deeply, gentle stretching, and light meditation.

During my coaching programme, I discuss my own, mindfulness-based, tools and techniques with clients.

To stop all that anxious night-time clock watching, remove them, or make sure all clock faces are out of view.



### 7. Don’t go to bed if you’re not tired...and if you can’t sleep, get up!

Try not to go to bed until you feel drowsy, and if you’re still awake fifteen minutes after going to bed, get up and do something else (in another room) until you’re feeling tired again.



### 8. Reassure yourself with sleep facts

For example, telling yourself that it’s normal to wake up in the night (because it is!) and gaining a fuller understanding of this will help prevent sleep anxiety.



### 9. Get more sunlight

If you can, try to take in more sunlight during the morning.

Natural morning light switches off melatonin production, and provides the light/dark indicator which induces sleep later in the evening.



### 10. Nap early

Napping earlier in the afternoon, for around half an hour, has been proven to have a positive effect on wellbeing, and even begin the brain’s renewal process of consolidating memories. (Don’t worry, a half-hour nap won’t affect your sleep schedule later on).

I hope these tips help you, and that you are feeling inspired to get the sleep you now know you need.

# One last thing...

Beyond EAP works successfully alongside HR and L&D professionals, and business owners, to provide vital support to their employees during times of emotional turbulence and change.

Please visit our website for more information.

I am always happy to arrange a confidential, no-obligation chat about any employee-related issues you're experiencing. To arrange this, or to discuss a bespoke programme of support for your employees and your business, please contact me.

Thank you for reading,

**Sandie**



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