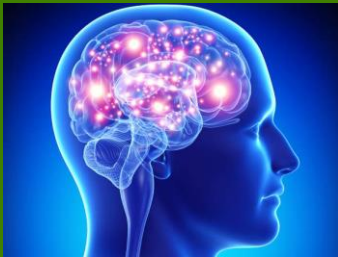




Gaertner Psychiatric  
Associates & Adult Services

# Food, Mood and Beyond



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## Sleepless in America

Add **insomnia** to the list of American epidemics. Over 60 million people in the US experience sleep disorders. So the next time you are wide awake at two or three in the morning running through your ToDo List or creating angst about he-said-she-said at the office, rest assured you are not alone.

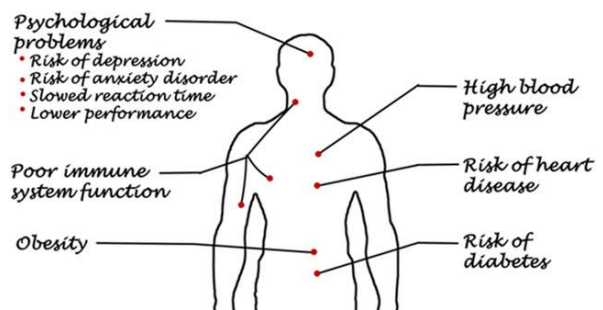


The average American gets about 6.5 hours of sleep a night. According to researchers at Columbia University's School of Public Health, teenagers suffer the most. Adolescents, at a developmental stage when their bodies require 8-10 hours of sleep a night, are averaging about seven.

The gold standard for adults has been and remains an average of 8 hours of restful sleep nightly. Why? Just ask anyone who

has suffered through grouchy moods, foggy brain and low energy after a rough night. But there is more to it. Chronic sleep deprivation leads to a multitude of physical and mental problems that can occur at any age. Maladies such as depression, weight gain, diabetes, adrenal fatigue, cancer, Alzheimer's, dementia and increased risk of accidents, to name a few.

### Complications of Insomnia



## The Sleep Deprived Brain

Science: Sleep deprivation involves many regions in the brain, including the neocortex, amygdala, and hippocampus.

Together, these regions influence cognitive, emotional, and memory functions that are impaired by sleep

deprivation. A “what came first, the chicken or the egg” phenomenon occurs whereby poor sleep effects emotional regulation and the ability to process information.

Real Life: Poor sleep can make you feel depressed anxious and irritable. All that emotional chaos makes it hard to think straight, remember things and learn new stuff.

My Mom used to tell me that every hour spent asleep before midnight was worth two hours spent asleep after midnight. This sounded like a ploy to get me to go to bed earlier when I left for college. But there is something to this. It is actually during the first third of the night that we experience our deepest healing and restorative sleep.

## **Changes you can make today to improve your sleep. Here are my top 10.**

### **1. Eliminate Environmental Culprits**

As we become more and more dependent on technology for entertainment, the exposure to sleep interrupting EMF (electromagnetic frequency) and blue light has become insidious. The most common sources of both are digital devices (eBook readers, computers, cell phones and energy efficient LED lights). Any type of light source at night can interrupt your circadian clock and melatonin levels, both responsible for how deeply you sleep and well-rested you

feel the next day. But the blue light disrupts sleep by actually stimulating the brain. So even if the blue light doesn't keep you awake, it still prevent you from dropping into the deep stage of sleep where healing, dreaming, and restoration happens.



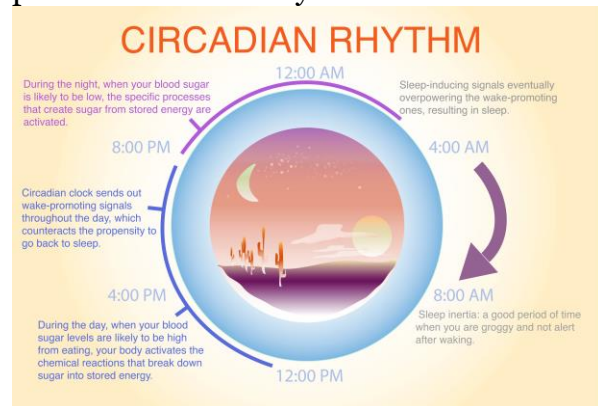
At night these changes may have yet another effect on your body. The feel good chemicals that we restock at night are not being produced.

I recommend putting away these pesky devices an hour before bedtime. If you like to read to help lull yourself to sleep, I suggest an old fashioned book. Cell phones and computers should be somewhere out of the bedroom. Even when turned off, all of these electronics emit EMF. A digital clock is less offensive than a cell phone for a wakeup call. For most folks I even go as far as to ask them to remove the bedroom TV. Yup. You read correctly. The bedroom is for sleep and sex only.

### **2. Get Outside**

Melatonin is a hormone in the brain which regulates our natural sleep cycles (circadian rhythm). It is affected by exposure to light and dark. When it is light, production of melatonin naturally drops. Getting at least 15 minutes of

sunlight in the morning hours helps to regulate the production of melatonin, dropping it to normal daytime levels, so you feel awake during the day and sleep better at night. Regular exercise helps support good sleep. The particular reasons have not been scientifically proven but I have my hunches.



First, we know exercise causes a rise in the feel good hormones in your brain. Secondly, we know exercise helps decrease anxiety and depression. Thirdly, depending on when you are exercising, the body's clock can be reset to a more sleep supportive rhythm. Lastly, Vitamin D which is produced with exposure to sunlight promotes good sleep.

### 3. Keep a consistent sleep schedule.

Going to bed and waking up as close to the same times every day, ensuring at least 7 hours, really helps to keep that biological clock on schedule.

4. Reduce caffeine intake and eliminate it after noon. Caffeine stays in your system long enough to disrupt sleep cycles and melatonin production, even if you no longer feel the buzz.

### 5. Lower your stress level and your

cortisol level. The release of melatonin is dependent on the release of another hormone, norepinephrine. Excess stress, and the resulting cortisol release will inhibit the release of norepinephrine and therefore the release of melatonin. Stress-reducing strategies you may find helpful before bed include yoga, stretching, meditation and prayer (topic of our August newsletter posted on our website).

6. Increase foods high in magnesium or take a dose of magnesium (500mg) daily. Magnesium plays a role in reducing brain activity at night, helping you to relax and fall asleep more easily.

## Magnesium Rich Foods



It works in tandem with melatonin.

7. Establish a bedtime ritual that is done every night. This will cue your brain that it is time to wind down. This may be as simple as drinking a cup of soothing herbal tea, getting a massage, or taking a nice warm bath with some soothing music.

### 8. Natural sleep Aids

**Melatonin** 1-3 mg 1/2 hour before sleep. Increases levels of melatonin in the brain which regulates natural sleep cycles.

**Valerian root** 250-600 milligrams at bedtime. Increases the levels of GABA in

the brain, causing a sedating and calming effect. It has a sedating effect with minimal side effects; most effective after 2 weeks. It does not taste as bad as it smells.

**GABA** 500-750 milligrams at bedtime. Increases natural GABA hormone which is a calming hormone in the brain.

**Lemon Balm** 80-150 milligrams at bedtime. I recommend finding a blend with Valerian root for best results.

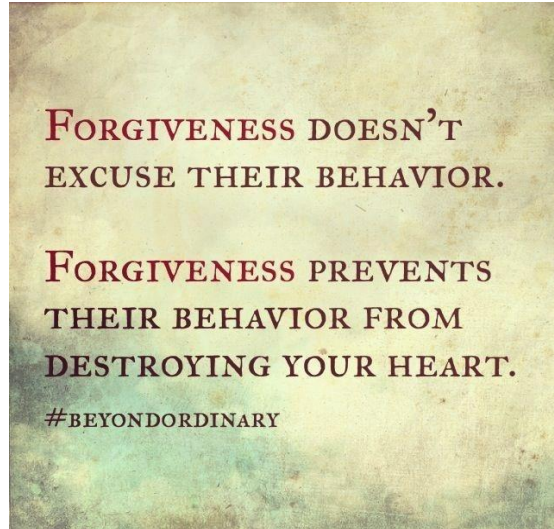
**Essential oils** rubbed on the soles of the feet or used in a diffuser.



The benefits go beyond relaxation and smelling good. The oils have an adaptogenic effect. This means they have the potential to actually restore hormonal balance in the brain and body.

**9. Avoid that bowl of ice cream before bed.** Eating sugary foods or a large meal close to bedtime causes an abrupt rise in blood sugar and then a blood sugar crash several hours after sleep. You may be one of those folks who wakes up when that happens.

**10. Connect with your Soul** There is nothing more powerful in creating a restful and restorative night's sleep than laying down at the end of the day with a sense of calm and fulfillment.



This is different than material satisfaction. I am suggesting a fullness in your heart that comes from being open to receiving as well as offering love and compassion to those around you. This simple but powerful act helps cultivate a sense of peace and joy in your heart. Where to start with this? Forgiveness. Forgive yourself first. This may take more than one pass. Then you can move on to those in your life you feel have hurt you.

“A well spent day brings happy sleep.”  
Leonardo da Vinci

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