

## **SLEEP SMARTER BY SHAWN STEVENSON | BOOK SUMMARY**

In Sleep Smarter author Shawn Stevenson takes you through his 21 steps for getting a good nights sleep. After reading the book you'll be amazed at how much of an impact sleep has on your health and productivity. This book is a great read if you're looking to improve the quality of your sleep and general well-being.

### **1. KNOW THE VALUE OF SLEEP**

There isn't one facet of your mental, emotional or physical performance that's not affected by the quality of your sleep. The consequences of sleep deprivation aren't pretty either. Try immune system failure, diabetes, cancer, obesity, depression and memory loss to name just a few. In regards to how sleep affects your productivity, you may think by sleeping less and working more you can accomplish more. This is a big no-no. When you're sleep deprived, you get slower, less creative, more stressed and studies show that sleep deprived individuals can take up to 14% longer to complete tasks and make 20% more mistakes when they do. Sleep deprivation reduces the amount of glucose that gets to your brain. This is why you snack on sugary snacks when you're tired – it's your bodies way of trying to get more sugar to power more thought. However, despite this, the quality of your sleep is lower and you quite literally get dumber. Have you ever made a poor decision and woken up the next day thinking: "man, what was I thinking?".

*SLEEP POWER TIP: When you have a big project due or a deadline looming, schedule enough time to make sure you complete the job at hand. Don't sacrifice sleep in order to meet deadlines.*

### **2. GET MORE SUNLIGHT DURING THE DAY**

Light signals your hypothalamus (your bodies master hormone gland) and all other organs and glands to be alert and wake up. Sunlight exposure (yes, it has to be natural light), triggers your body to produce optimal levels of daytime hormones and regulates your biological clock. Melatonin, the hormone that creates optimum sleep conditions in your body, is produced during the day and is heavily affected by exposure to light. Basically, by getting more sunlight during the day and limiting light exposure in the evening, you're on your way to a magic sleep formula that really works.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Maximise sunlight exposure, particularly between the hours of 6:00 and 8:30am. If you work in an office, get out during the day and go for a walk to get some natural sunlight.*

### **3. AVOID THE SCREENS BEFORE BEDTIME**

Now that we understand the importance that light has on our circadian rhythm, make sure to avoid the harsh blue light from electronic devices like phones and tablets in the evening. The light will throw off your melatonin secretion and makes it harder to get to sleep.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Limit device use 90 minutes before sleep. Read a book instead.*

### **4. HAVE A CAFFEINE CURFEW**

Caffeine is a powerful nervous system stimulant and is great during the morning to help boost alertness and productivity. However, you must limit caffeine consumption (from coffee, tea, chocolate etc..) within 6–8 hours before bed. Give yourself a curfew. Here's what happens when you have caffeine: all the time you're awake, neurons in your brain are firing and producing a neurotransmitter byproduct known as adenosine. Your nervous system is constantly looking out for adenosine in your body because once those levels get to a certain point in your brain and spinal cord, your body starts to nudge you to go to sleep. Here's the interesting part; caffeine is so structurally similar to adenosine that it fits into the receptor sites in your body that adenosine is trying to get into and as a result your body is tired, but you don't even know it.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Set a caffeine curfew at around 2pm. Caffeine has a half-life of 8 hours i.e. 200mg of caffeine becomes 100mg in 8 hours, and 50mg 8 hours after that. It hangs around in your system for a long-time so be careful when consuming caffeine.*

### **5. BE COOL**

The temperature of your body greatly affects the quality of your sleep. Something called thermoregulation heavily influences your sleep cycles. When it's time to sleep there is an automatic drop in body temperature to help initiate sleep. If it's too hot, it can be a psychological challenge for your body to get into the ideal state for restful sleep. The solution; create a nice cool environment for sleep. Just don't overdo it.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Take a warm bath/shower an hour or two before bed. the increased core body temperature from the heat will fall accordingly and level out a little cooler right before bed.*

## **6. GET TO BED AT THE RIGHT TIME**

You can get amplified sleep quality by going to sleep at the right time. There is a magic window of time between 10:00pm and 2:00am when hormone secretion and recovery is at it's optimum. By sleeping during this window you get better quality sleep compared to someone who may get the same number of hours of sleep but who misses this window. After about 10pm your body also experiences a natural high as melatonin is secreted into your body. Melatonin secretion is fine if you're already asleep, but if you're awake, the energy that comes from melatonin will make getting to sleep a lot harder.

*SLEEP POWER TIP:* Make sure you're asleep during this golden window of opportunity. Set your alarm to wake you up at the top of a sleep cycle. Sleep cycles are your bodies natural rise and fall of sleep depth which take about 90 minutes. By waking up at the top of a cycle, you wake up feeling refreshed and alert. Wake up at the bottom (about 45 minutes in) and you'll wake up feeling pretty groggy.

## **7. RUB THE 'ANTI-STRESS' MINERAL INTO YOUR SKIN**

Magnesium is a bonafide anti-stress mineral. It helps to balance blood sugar, optimise circulation and blood pressure, relax tense muscles, reduce pain and calm the nervous system. Because it has so many functions it tends to get depleted from your system rather quickly and as a result about 80% of people are actually magnesium deficient. By reducing the stress on your body you will naturally get a better nights sleep. magnesium bath flags and oils are a great way of getting extra magnesium into your body. As a lot of the benefits of magnesium are lost during digestion, supplements aren't as effective.

*SLEEP POWER TIP:* Keep the magnesium infusion beside your bed and apply it to areas that are sore, stressed, on the chest, neck and shoulders.

## **8. CREATE A SLEEP SANCTUARY**

The bedroom should only be used for two things: 1) sleep and 2) the 'other thing'. Bringing work to bed is one of the worst things you can do. This creates stressful associations with that environment, which isn't conducive to quality sleep. Make sure the bedroom gets fresh air. Air gradually becomes stale as the ions in it lose their negative charge. Negative ions are more energising as they provide free electrons and they oxidise odors, mould, parasites and toxic chemical gases. Having plants in your room or house is a great way of recycling the old air.

*SLEEP POWER TIP:* Get at least one house plant. Keep work out of the bedroom.

## **9. HAVE A BIG "O"**

This is the other primary thing the bedroom should be used for. Having an orgasm can be like a full-on sedative. When you orgasm you release a cocktail of chemicals like norepinephrine, serotonin, oxytocin, vasopressin and prolactin. This rush of relaxing endorphins and hormones can be just the thing you need for a great night's sleep.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: This should be pretty self explanatory. Just remember, you don't necessarily need a partner to get the benefits.*

## **10. GET IT BLACKED OUT**

You naturally sleep better in a dark environment and having any kind of sunlight in the room can significantly decrease the quality of your sleep. Eye masks aren't the answer. Did you know that light is also absorbed through your skin? i.e your skin can see. This light, as we know inhibits melatonin production. As a reminder, melatonin has been proven to: improve immune system function, normalise blood pressure, reduce proliferation of cancer cells and tumour growth, enhance DNA protection, decrease osteoporosis, alleviates migraine and other pain, improves thyroid function and improves insulin sensitivity and weight loss.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Black out curtains are a great way of getting rid of light pollution. Remove light up devices and get a dim alarm clock.*

## **11. TRAIN HARD (BUT SMART)**

When you workout you're literally tearing your body apart and damaging muscle tissue. When you sleep, your body goes through a restorative stage and repairs the damaged tissue. By working out, you're forcing your body to secrete more beneficial hormones to build you up better than before. Workout in the morning. Evening workouts don't allow enough time for your body's core temperature to drop before sleep. The best hormonal response comes from lifting weights, not cardio. This releases more of the anabolic hormones that make you look, feel and sleep better.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Lift weights at least two days a week. Focus on shorter super-sets.*

## **12. GET YOUR "FRIENDS" OUT OF THE BEDROOM**

With modern technology, many people are sitting in bed and sleeping next to a mountain of gadgets – laptops, phones, tablets and e-readers. Studies have shown that people who use these devices before bed take longer to reach the deeper stages of sleep and don't spend as long in this stage. These devices also emit harmful electric and magnetic fields known as EMFs. EMFs from common

electronic devices have been linked to leukaemia, brain tumours and breast cancer. i.e. it's not healthy to sleep next to your devices. Keep them in a separate room and away from your head.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Use a good old fashioned alarm clock to wake you up. Talk to your partner before bed, or have a big 'O'. This should keep you more than entertained.*

### **13. LOSE WEIGHT AND DON'T FIND IT AGAIN**

Obesity can in fact result in lower quality sleep. Being overweight causes severe stress to your internal organs, nervous system and distrust your endorphin system (which produces beneficial hormones like melatonin) like few things can. Overweight individuals are more sensitive to cortisol (anti-sleep hormone) secretion after eating a meal and this lowers your insulin sensitivity and increases blood pressure and inflammation. Be sure to get a good macronutrient balance of fats, protein and carbs. Often we consume too many carbs, which releases insulin in the body and that's what stores fat. A higher ratio of fats and protein enables your pancreas to produce more glycogen and less insulin. Glycogen triggers the breakdown of stored fatty-acids for fuel i.e. fat loss.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Focus on whole foods and avoid processed food. Avoid food, especially carbs before just bed. Start your day with a good meal – not carbs as this will cause an insulin spike.*

### **14. GO EASY ON THE BOTTLE**

When you drink before sleep, you fall asleep faster but don't get into the deeper sleep stages and your brain and body won't be able to fully rejuvenate. Of course if you're waking up to go to the bathroom this is even more disruptive.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: If drinking, wrap it with some time to spare before sleep. Ideally 4 hours. Also, make sure you drink plenty of water before you hit the sack.*

### **15. PLAY YOUR POSITION**

This may be surprising, but sleeping position can affect your sleep quality. It has an impact on blood flow to the brain, stability of your spine, hormone production, oxygen supply and breathing. You need to sleep in a position that's going to aid recovery. Sleeping on your back is good for your spine and lowering digestive distress, however it can cause sleep apnea (inefficient breathing) and snoring. Sleeping on your front can be ideal as it prevents snoring. Make sure you lift one knee to open up your hips and ditch the pillow so you don't hyperextend your neck. Most people prefer sleeping on their side. This is one of the most natural sleeping

positions (similar to how we once were in the womb) and helps to ease digestive problems and heartburn. Just be careful of the dreaded dead arm that often comes with it.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Choose the position that best works for you and try and stick with it.*

## **16. CALM YOUR INNER CHATTER**

Often we hop into bed and then proceed to think about the when, where, who, why, what and how's of life. This inner chatter can keep you awake for along time and makes sleeping much harder. The solution, can help your sleep as well as transform your entire life – meditation. Meditation doesn't require you to subscribe to some religion or spiritual beliefs and benefits can be had after just 10 minutes a day. Meditation enhances the release of the “feel-good” hormones and endorphins, lowers stress and inflammation in the body. Meditation can help improve your focus, creativity, memory, imagination, productivity, performance and attention. Meditation literally changes the shape of your brain and it increases the size of your alpha waves when focusing. These are the brain waves where imagination, visualisation, memory, learning and concentration are heightened.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Meditating in the morning is often the most beneficial time to do so. It's when your brain is already near the alpha state. Start with guided meditation to begin with.*

## **17. USE SMART SUPPLEMENTATION**

Ideally you address your lifestyle issues first, but there are also some supplements that can aid sleep: 1) Chamomile – this herb helps to calm the nervous system, relaxes muscles and sets you up for a good nights sleep. Have a cup of chamomile tea before bed. 2) Kava kava – this national drink of Fiji contains a natural sedative and is ideal for treating sleeplessness and reduces the amount of time needed to fall asleep. 3) Valerian – This herb is also a sedative, although a little stronger. Having a valerian tea before bed contributes to uninterrupted sleep and reduces the time needed to fall asleep. It is advised that you don't take melatonin supplements as this can decrease your bodies natural production of the hormone. If you're going to take it, only use it over the short-term.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Address all the other tactics in the book before using supplementation to help your sleep.*

## **18. BE EARLY TO RISE**

Getting up early is a great way of getting a natural hit of sunlight in the morning, but it's also ideal for setting you up well for the day. Going to sleep early and waking up early helps to sync your body with the earth's natural circadian rhythm which is more restorative than trying to sleep when the sun is up. Waking up early with a sense of purpose, as opposed to sleeping in, is a great way to start the day in a more motivated state. Morning people tend to exhibit character traits like optimism, satisfaction and conscientiousness. Getting started on your goals by 8am gives you an extra sense of optimism.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Go to bed within 30 minutes of the same time every night. Many people think they can sleep less during the week and "catch up" at the weekend. All this does is throw your schedule out of whack.*

## **19. DRESS FOR THE OCCASION**

Putting on your PJs can act as a mental trigger to get into a relaxed and comfortable state. As we have discussed, body temperature is very important for creating the right sleeping conditions. Make sure you wear fewer and looser clothes to bed. Avoid PJs that restrict or strangle different parts of your body (e.g. tight socks). This isn't good for blood flow or the flow of your lymphatic system (used for waste management in the body). Women should consider going braless. Don't worry, this won't necessarily result in saggy breasts, in fact it can help build up the muscle needed to get them supporting themselves.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Men, try wearing boxers, loose fitting tops, basic t-shirts or go naked. Women, try boy shorts, your significant others t-shirt, flowing lingerie, yoga pants or going naked.*

## **20. GET GROUNDED**

Scientists have found that as we go about our lives, driving in our cars, going from home to work always wearing our shoes and never coming in to contact with the earth that this is having a significant impact on our health. The earth's electromagnetic surface has huge benefits on the human body. The body is actually a conductor and every day you go through cellular damage, simply by living your life. Damaged cells in the body set off an oxidative burst of free radicals to address them. This is basic chemistry featuring a positive charged event that needs to be neutralised. Antioxidants carry free electrons that neutralise the free radicals and stop overly-aggressive oxidation right in its tracks. Inflammation is reduced and your health is improved. However, eating antioxidants isn't as effective as you think. Often the processing that goes on with food strips out much of the goodness and even then, they have to withstand the digestive process in your body. Scientists have found that the earth's surface is brimming with free electrons that

can easily be absorbed by the human body. Grounding the body increases the surface charge on red blood cells and thereby reduces blood viscosity and clumping. Remaining grounded during sleep reduces night time levels of cortisol in the body. Remember, cortisol is the arch enemy of sleep.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Get an earthing mat at your desk or use earthing sheets on your bed. If you can't do this, simply make an effort to ground yourself regularly. Simply touch the ground or a tree. Going to the beach is a fantastic way of doing this, and it's often why we sleep so well on holidays. Grounding yourself after a long flight can also help to overcome the effects of jet lag and the stress long-distance travel puts on your body.*

## **21. RITUALISE YOUR NIGHT**

Now that we've covered the essentials for getting a good night sleep, it's time to put this into practice in an ongoing and consistent routine. Humans are creatures of habit and your brain loves patterns so it can free up space to focus on other things. You need to turn sleep into an unconscious competency i.e. you're doing something well and you don't have to think about it. In the beginning you'll have to put conscious effort into doing all of these things well. Over time they will become habit and feel a lot more natural. Make sure you get in the mood before bed and take time to unwind and relax. Read some fiction, take a bath, write in a journal, thinking about things you're grateful for or meditate.

*SLEEP POWER TIP: Don't worry about getting everything perfect every night. Life happens and you may get thrown off. Roll with it and adapt. It is said it takes 21 days to turn something into habit. This changes from person to person and depends on the habit. Put conscious effort into the above tasks for 30 days to embed them in your routine.*