

Title: Mental Health Mondays - ■■ Let's Talk About Sleep! ■

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At the inception of my intentional self investing journey, I began with something so basic but so major to really improve my quality of life. I tackled my insomnia and stopped relying on sleep medications to get me to sleep.

I hadn't had a single night of organic, non-medicated sleep in well over 5 years. I'd finally had enough because while I was able to sleep with the help of my medications, I never actually felt rested. I suffered from terrible brain fog and drowsiness with the medications, but the side effects were favorable over not getting any sleep at all. I never felt like I had the time or patience to devote to finding a way to sleep without medicating, and frankly I didn't know if I even could.

As it turns out, I absolutely could and it has changed my life. I see benefits in everything from physical health to mental health and emotional regulation. I started my sleep improvement journey 3 months ago and am still refining my techniques to this day! This Mental Health Monday let's talk about sleep :D

Overall Health & Sleep

Quality sleep or lack thereof can impact your physical and mental health in some key ways.

Physical Health & Sleep

According to the [CDC - Sleep & Chronic

Disease](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/chronic_disease.html), insufficient sleep has been linked to the development and management of key chronic diseases including:

* **Diabetes** - "Research has found that insufficient sleep is linked to an increased risk for the development of type 2 diabetes."

* **Cardiovascular Disease** - "Persons with sleep apnea have been found to be at increased risk for a number of cardiovascular diseases. Notably, hypertension, stroke, coronary heart disease and irregular heartbeats (*cardiac arrhythmias*) have been found to be more common among those with disordered sleep than their peers without sleep abnormalities."

* **Obesity** - "Laboratory research has found that short sleep duration results in metabolic changes that may be linked to obesity. Epidemiologic studies conducted in the community have also revealed an association between short sleep duration and excess body weight. "

For more reading about the relationship between physical health and sleep, check out [Sleep Foundation - Physical Health & Sleep](<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/physical-health>).

Mental Health & Sleep

According to [Sleep Foundation - Mental Health & Sleep](<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/mental-health>), there's evidence of a bi-directional relationship between poor sleep and many of the commonly experienced mental health disorders including:

- * Depression
- * Bipolar Disorder
- * Anxiety Disorder
- * Schizophrenia
- * ADHD

In many cases, treatment of sleep disorders or improving sleep quality can reduce the impacts of the associated mental health disorder as well.

For more reading about sleep and its effects on mental health, check out [Harvard Health - Sleep & Mental Health](https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/sleep-and-mental-health).

Common Sleep Disorders

According to the [CDC - Key Sleep Disorders](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/key_disorders.html) common sleep disorders include:

Insomnia - "Insomnia is characterized by an inability to initiate or maintain sleep. It may also take the form of *early morning awakening* in which the individual awakens several hours early and is unable to resume sleeping. Difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep may often manifest itself as *excessive daytime sleepiness*, which characteristically results in functional impairment throughout the day."

Narcolepsy - "Excessive daytime sleepiness (including episodes of *irresistible sleepiness*) combined with sudden muscle weakness are the hallmark signs of narcolepsy. The sudden muscle weakness seen in narcolepsy may be elicited by strong emotion or surprise. Episodes of narcolepsy have been described as "sleep attacks" and may occur in unusual circumstances, such as walking and other forms of physical activity."

Restless Legs Syndrome - "RLS is characterized by an unpleasant "creeping" sensation, often feeling like it is originating in the lower legs, but often associated with aches and pains throughout the legs. This often causes difficulty initiating sleep and is relieved by movement of the leg, such as walking or kicking."

Sleep Apnea - "Snoring may be more than just an annoying habit – it may be a sign of sleep apnea. Persons with sleep apnea characteristically make periodic gasping or "snorting" noises, during which their sleep is momentarily interrupted. Those with sleep apnea may also experience excessive daytime sleepiness, as their sleep is commonly interrupted and may not feel restorative."

For more reading about sleep disorders, check out [Sleep Foundation - Sleep Disorders](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-disorders). If you're experiencing any symptoms of a sleep disorder listed above, speak with your health care provider about diagnosis and treatment!

Sleep Hygiene

So how much sleep do we really need?

The [CDC - How Much Sleep Do I Need?](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html) gives a nifty table with ranges for sleep for each age range. Here's the adult information for easy reference:

Age Group	Sleep Recommended
18–60 years	7 or more hours per night
61–64 years	7–9 hours
65 years and older	7–8 hours

We can continue striving towards the recommended hours of sleep by practicing good sleep hygiene!

What is Sleep Hygiene?

According to [Headspace - Sleep Hygiene Tips](https://www.headspace.com/sleep/sleep-hygiene), "Sleep hygiene is science-backed practices — during the day and before bedtime — that help create the ideal conditions for healthy sleep, can mean the difference between a restful night and a restless one."

11 Tips for Proper Sleep Hygiene

Headspace provides the following 11 tips for proper sleep hygiene:

- Set a consistent sleep schedule.** - "Creating a sleep framework sets the body's internal clock to

expect to rest at a certain time each day. Contrary to what might seem logical, even if you haven't slept well during the night, it's best not to allow yourself to sleep in later the next morning."

2. ****Create a relaxing bedtime/pre-bedtime routine.**** \- Do a relaxing activity about 1 hour before bed to help smooth the transition between wakefulness and sleep.

3. ****Keep your room cool and comfortable.****

4. ****Dim the lights after dark.****

5. ****Unplug an hour before bed.**** \- Be sure to sleep with your phone out of reach, on do not disturb, or flipped over so that notifications do not disturb your sleep.

6. ****Steer clear of stimulants late in the day**** \- Avoid foods and beverages that contain caffeine at least 6 hours before bedtime.

7. ****Avoid foods that can disrupt sleep**** \- "Citrus fruits, spicy food, fatty or fried food, and heavy meals are all tough on the digestive system and can trigger indigestion. If you're prone to heartburn, eating too close to bedtime can mean a night of misery."

8. ****Nix the nightcaps**** \- "Alcohol alters what's called "sleep architecture," the natural flow of sleep through different stages such as deep sleep, REM sleep, and light sleep. Drinking can also lead to lighter, more restless sleep, diminishing sleep depth and quality, so you're more likely to wake up feeling fatigued."

9. ****Get regular exercise.****

10. ****Only use your bed for sleep and sex**** \- "...sleep hygiene experts recommend getting out of bed and going to another room if you don't fall asleep within 20 minutes."

11. ****Limit or avoid naps during the day**** \- "Although a short power nap of 20-25 minutes can lift your mood and leave you more refreshed, at least in the short term, it won't make up for poor quality sleep at night. However, if you are experiencing trouble falling or staying asleep, it can be best to avoid naps altogether. A late-afternoon snooze will decrease your homeostatic sleep drive, making it harder to drift off at bedtime."

I personally have spent a majority of my time and focus over the last 3 months working on 1-9, but I am definitely a chronic offender of 10 and 11. I love relaxing in bed (I'm writing this post in bed right now) and I absolutely adore napping during the day. It'll be hard to break those two bad habits, but I know if I want to take my sleep hygiene to the next level, 10 and 11 are the necessary next steps for even more restful sleep.

For more reading about sleep hygiene, why it's important, and how you can improve your sleep hygiene, check out [Sleep Foundation - Sleep Hygiene](<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene>).

Making small changes to your sleeping environment, routine, or talking to your doctor about symptoms that may indicate a sleep disorder are all small things you can do today to show up for yourself in a big way. Striving for better sleep is a major self investment! ****Let's all try to #RatioAtSelfCare this week**** and [happy 🍷](<https://media.giphy.com/media/KENUND3gyffxvoi2wH/giphy.gif>)!

Edit: formatting update on the 11 habits list.