

Savour the sweet sound of sleep zzzzzzz It's good to sleep so make it sweet.

Poor sleep or lack of sleep is a common complaint. While a constant extending of waking hours is desirable but we might make ourselves a disservice in our ambition to fit more into the day. Often quality as well as quantity of sleep suffer. Not only do we become easily irritated, anxious and lose concentration but it's not good for our long term health of our nervous system it turns out when we sleep the brain gets cleaned up Recently in the news as nhs advice older people need 7-8 hours sleep per night to maintain good health.

It's not entirely clear why we need to sleep, all mammals need sleep but it is a vulnerable state as the decreased alertness snoozing away increase the chance of being targeted by predators. This compromise suggest sleep serves a fundamental biological function.

Though studies show sleep enhances memory, the brains metabolism is not reduced enough to explain the biological need for sleep.

What now has been discovered is an irrigation system running along the arteries and capillaries within brain that kicks in whilst asleep (or under the influence of anaesthetics) and called the Glymphatic system. This was discovered by neuroscientist Maiken Nedergaard and team whilst working at the University of Rochester Medical Centre. The scientists noticed that during sleep the level of cerebrospinal fluid in and around the brain is rapidly increased, moving in deeply and quickly, pushing into spaces in and around the brain, clearing itself of neurotoxic waste produced during the wake state. The team discovered when researching on mice, that this increased flow was possible in part because when mice went to sleep, their brain cells actually shrank, making it easier for fluid to circulate. When an animal woke up, the brain cells enlarged again and the flow between cells slowed to a trickle.

The build up of protein waste so called plaque in the the brain has been linked to illnesses such as Alzheimers and discovering this mechanism of cleaning scientist are now looking in this direction to understand and cure these type of illnesses.

For us amateurs it might be enough to have a brief understanding of our anatomy and how we have these different biological functions and systems supporting our health and in this case perhaps evaluate our sleeping habits.

There are many ways to approach this but I suggest beginning by taking a look at the physical situation in and around sleeping. Is it falling a sleep that is difficult or waking up in night and not able to go back to sleep. Try to address the underlying cause if possible. Lack of routine, too many stimulants, snoring or anxiety. You might just need to sharpen things up a little or have to take on learning to handle worry and anxiety. This is where I have had the biggest transformation in sleeping well, through yoga, meditation and therapy.

Take inventory of your priorities, it's great to have a newly painted bedroom but not at the expense of good bed and bedding. Clean crisp sheets makes for inviting rest as does freshly aired room so look after your space you are using for sleep.

Make and take time to go bed and allow yourself to prepare for sweet sleep. Perhaps set a time to get ready for bed and allow some time to wind yourself down. We **fall** asleep or **slip** into sleep implying a letting go so look to find ways to relax your body and mind before bedtime. Pause the image bombardment before going to bed letting your eyes relax and turn to reading or listening. The smart phone and internet can be used smartly in finding music or sound that helps you drift off. I use Max Richters recording Sleep in my massages, its 8 hours long but there is a 50 minute version. Highly recommended. Hearing someone reading is an other of my favourites, though I must admit missing the story most of the time, but again the internet is useful. I would avoid the headphones for this purpose as the sound is too close and might be stimulating.

Happy sleeping

