Better Sleep for Better Health

What if I were to tell you that one simple thing could improve your health and well-being, increase your ability to learn new things, help you stay on your diet, and make you less sensitive to pain? Wouldn’t you want it? This isn’t some miracle therapy that costs thousands of dollars. In fact, it’s free. It’s the everyday miracle of a good night’s sleep.

Unfortunately, many of us are shortchanging ourselves by not getting enough sleep. We go to bed too late and get up too early. And when we do go to bed with the intention of getting a good night’s sleep, something gets in the way. We lie in bed, tossing and turning. Our minds race with the worries of the day or the chores of tomorrow. We try deep breathing, counting sheep, or other techniques to help us sleep. They don’t always work.

Some people reach for over-the-counter or prescription drugs to help them fall asleep. But the side effects range from annoying—as in waking up groggy—to downright disturbing. Certain prescription sleep aids have been associated with “sleep eating,” where people eat during the night, but in the morning have no memory of what they ate. Even more alarming are the stories of people driving while under the influence of these sleep aids, crashing into parked cars—even running over people—and having no memory of it after. The incidences may be rare, but it’s not an acceptable risk to me.

Fall Asleep Naturally—Without Harmful Side Effects
Natural medicines may be just what you need to help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep. These four botanicals are known for their ability to calm our minds and relax our bodies so we can sleep more soundly.

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) is a lemon-scented herb that has been used medicinally for centuries. Lemon balm is an effective calming agent and mild sedative. Recent scientific studies have proposed that lemon balm may bind to gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) receptors, helping the nervous system calm down. With mild anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties, lemon balm may also help reduce pain that can cause sleeplessness. In a double-blind, placebo-controlled British study, healthy volunteers in the lemon balm treatment group significantly improved their cognitive function and calmness ratings compared to placebo. What’s more, the calmness lasted the remainder of the testing day.

*Lavender* (*Lavandula angustifolia*) is another natural sleep aid. Long promoted for its effects on feelings of well-being, lavender flowers were commonly placed under pillows to help promote sleep. The very scent of lavender has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve sleep quality.

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**Terry’s Bottom Line**

Not getting a good night’s sleep can have devastating repercussions on our health and well-being. Unfortunately, over-the-counter sleep aids can disrupt our natural sleep cycle, leaving us feeling groggy and out of sorts. And prescription sleep aids can have disturbing side effects. We have better options—natural ingredients that can help us fall asleep gently and wake up refreshed—without harmful side effects.

**HERE IS THE FORMULA I SUGGEST:**

I recommend taking lemon balm, lavender, mandarin, and ravensara to help fall asleep gently and wake up refreshed.
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launder is calming, so much so that one study in the Journal of Research in Pharmacy Practice found it helpful in relieving the anxiety of patients in dental offices. Scientific studies suggest that lavender oil works to relieve anxiety and as a mild sedative, increasing deep sleep. People who use lavender also experience more energy and alertness in the morning.

Mandarin (Citrus reticulata) is traditionally used to help settle the nervous system and induce sleep. The dried peel, or zest, of mandarin has been recorded in the Chinese Pharmacopoeia, which describes most Chinese and Western medicines and preparations. Mandarin owes its name to the Chinese Mandarins who traditionally received this fruit as a gift. It is a close relative of the tangerine. Mandarin peel is widely used to fight stress because of its exceptional soothing and calming effects. Scientists believe that the compounds in mandarin peel, including limonene, work synergistically to promote relaxation and sleep.

Ravensara (Ravensara aromatica), a rainforest tree with very fragrant leaves, bark, and nuts, has long been used as an all-around health tonic by the indigenous people of Madagascar. I recommend ravensara leaf oil because of its powerful effects for relieving insomnia, reducing depression, and alleviating nervous tension. As a traditional remedy, ravensara is remarkable for its efficacy and healing potential.

You might be asking yourself, “what about valerian?” Valerian is a well-known herbal sleep aid, used alone or in combination with other natural compounds. I believe that some people do sleep better with valerian, but for others, valerian is a stimulant. For this reason, it’s not the first herb I recommend for sleep. I believe the herbs I’ve recommended here will work effectively for everyone.

The Wonders of a Good Night’s Sleep

It’s truly amazing what sleep can do for you. It helps us be happier and more productive. Science is finding that sleep is even more important than we thought. According to a study funded by the National Institutes of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, our brains may use sleep to flush out toxic molecules (like beta amyloid that’s associated with Alzheimer’s disease) that can build up during the day. We know that our brains get smaller as we grow older, leading to cognitive decline. Research shows that getting too little sleep could affect how fast our brains shrink, particularly after we reach age sixty.

I’ve always believed that sleep was incredibly important to our health. Thankfully, when our busy lives get in the way, natural sleep aids, like lemon balm, lavender, mandarin, and ravensara, can help all of us enjoy more restful, sound sleep.

COMMON SENSE

SLEEP TIPS

1. Keep A Regular Schedule
   Maintain the same bedtime and wake up schedule, even on the weekends, to help regulate your body clock.

2. Turn Off Electronics Early
   Electronic devices (computers, tablets, phones) just before bed are not a good idea as the bright screens suppress melatonin production, and can actually stimulate the mind, rather than relax it.

3. Avoid Caffeine
   Watch your caffeine intake if you are sensitive—even caffeine consumed in the morning hours can affect nighttime slumber in some individuals.

4. Exercise
   Regular exercise can help you sleep more deeply. Adding just a few minutes of activity to your day can make a difference in your rest.

When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This article is intended to provide you with information to maintain your health.

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