DR. MARLÉ VAN DER MERWE
MEDICAL AESTHETICS

DR. MARLÉ'S SLEEP HYGIENE TIPS

Getting quality sleep is less about what you do the moment your head hits the pillow and more about the habits you build throughout the day. Think of it as training your body's internal clock. Here is a breakdown of the most effective sleep hygiene tips to help you catch better zzz's.

Master Your Routine

1. Stick to a schedule: Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day - yes, even on weekends. This anchors your circadian rhythm.
2. Create a 30-minute wind-down: Give your brain a transition zone. Read a physical book, stretch, journal, or listen to calming music.
3. Disconnect from screens: Turn off phones, tablets, and TVs at least 30–60 minutes before bed. The blue light emitted by these devices tricks your brain into thinking it's still daytime, suppressing melatonin production.
4. Use common sense with daytime sleep: Avoid sleeping during the day and skip naps to ensure you are tired enough when bedtime rolls around.

Optimize Your Environment

1. Keep it cool: The ideal room temperature for sleep is around 15–19°C (60–67°F). Your body temperature needs to drop slightly to initiate sleep.
2. Make it a cave: Use blackout curtains or an eye mask to eliminate light. Use earplugs or a white noise machine to drown out disruptive sounds.
3. Reserve the bed for sleep: Avoid working, eating, or watching TV in bed. You want your brain to have a strong mental association between your bed and sleep.

Daily Habits That Matter

1. Seek morning light: Get at least 10–15 minutes of natural sunlight first thing in the morning. This stops melatonin production and sets your timer for bedtime later tonight.
2. Exercise daily: Stay active during the day; otherwise, your body won't feel tired or ready for deep rest at night.
3. Watch the caffeine clock: Cut off caffeine at least 6 hours before you plan to sleep. It stays in your system much longer than you think.
4. Limit alcohol and heavy meals: While alcohol might make you drowsy, it destroys your sleep quality later in the night. Avoid heavy, spicy meals within 4 hours of bedtime to prevent indigestion.
5. Consider bananas for a light dinner: If you need a snack before bed, bananas are an excellent option because they naturally contain a lot of melatonin.

Protect Your Gut Microbiome

1. Understand the gut-sleep connection: Your gut microbiome secretes melatonin to help you sleep and improve overall sleep quality, making gut protection vital.
2. Avoid microbiome disruptors: Steer clear of unnecessary antibiotics, avoid pesticides on foods (always wash your fruits and veggies), and eat as little white flour as possible.
3. Boost your gut health deliberately: Take a probiotic and eat plenty of fruits and vegetables to increase and maintain a healthy microbiome, which in turn boosts your natural melatonin production.

The 20-Minute Rule

If you've been tossing and turning for more than 20 minutes, get out of bed. Go to a dimly lit room and do something relaxing (like reading) until you feel drowsy, then return to bed. Staying in bed awake only trains your brain to associate the bed with frustration and anxiety.

SLEEP MEDICATIONS

- Sleep medications act as powerful central nervous system sedatives by either enhancing the brain's calming chemicals or blocking the chemicals that keep you awake.
- While they induce unconsciousness, they do not provide natural sleep and actively suppress the deep and REM stages required for physical and emotional restoration.
- Over time, the brain develops a tolerance to these drugs, leading to chemical dependency and a severe worsening of sleeplessness (rebound insomnia) if you try to stop.
- Chronic use is linked to significant long-term health risks, including memory impairment, dangerous sleepwalking behaviors, and an increased risk of cognitive decline, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease.
- Because of these side effects, medical experts recommend following and implementing sleep hygiene tips.