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Plenary 5

Strategies for Getting Better Sleep

Presenter:

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About the Presenter...

Susan Hoefs, FAAST, CCSH, RPSGT has worked in the field of Sleep Medicine for over 30 years. She is currently a sleep coach at BetterUp which is a leadership coaching program. She has been awarded several awards over her career from the American Association of Sleep Technologists (AAST) including Distinguished Service, Peter McGregor Award (AAST Leadership Award) and was recently named a Fellow of the AAST. She speaks at conferences across the country and is published in several sleep medicine publications.



Strategies for Getting Better Sleep

Unlock Your Best Rest Tonight

Discover practical strategies to transform your nights and wake up refreshed every morning.

1

Susan Hoefs, FAAST, CCSH, RPSGT

With over 30 years of experience in Sleep Medicine, Sue is dedicated to helping individuals achieve restful sleep. Her holistic approach integrates scientific research with practical strategies for a healthier, more energized life.

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Sleep Matters More Than You Think

Health Impact

Poor sleep affects memory, mood, weight, and significantly increases your risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

National Crisis

Nearly 8 in 10 Americans report that just one extra hour of sleep would dramatically improve their daily functioning and wellbeing.

Fundamental Need

Sleep is the "golden chain" tying health and body together, as Thomas Dekker wisely observed centuries ago.

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The Architecture of Sleep: Understanding Your Sleep Cycles

1

Stage 1: Light Sleep

The transition between wakefulness and sleep where you can be easily awakened.

2

Stage 2: Intermediate

Body temperature drops, heart rate slows, and brain waves become slower with occasional bursts of activity.

3

Stage 3: Deep Sleep

The most restorative phase where tissue growth and repair occurs, immune function strengthens, and energy is restored. Waste is eliminated from your brain.

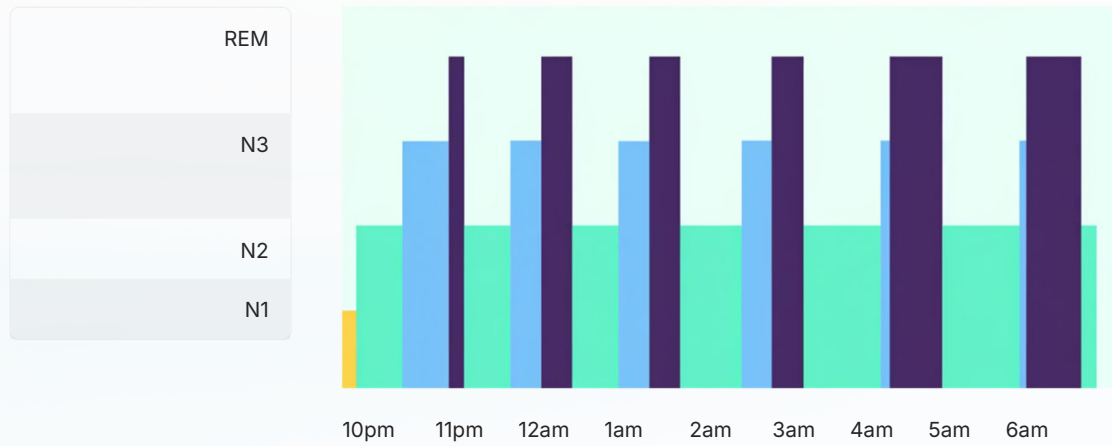
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REM Sleep

Brain activity increases, dreams occur, and memory consolidation takes place during this critical phase.

A complete sleep cycle takes 90-110 minutes, repeating 4-6 times throughout the night.

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Sleep Disorders

Over 80 disorders of sleep but the most common are:

Insomnia

Obstructed Sleep Apna

Narcolepsy

Restless Legs Syndrome/Periodic Limb Movements

Parasomnias

Circadian Rhythm Disorders

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The Caffeine Connection: Blocking Drowsiness

Adenosine is a natural brain chemical that accumulates throughout the day, binding to receptors and signaling your body to feel drowsy.

Caffeine acts as a mimic, structurally similar to adenosine. It binds to these same receptors but doesn't activate them, effectively blocking adenosine's drowsy signal.

This competitive binding keeps you feeling alert and awake, preventing the natural build-up of sleep pressure.

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It's Not About the Jitters

You may not feel jittery or really wide awake after caffeine intake. But that doesn't mean it doesn't affect your sleep. Caffeine increases neuron firing, the pituitary gland responds by releasing adrenaline which can stay in your system for up to six hours.

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The Hormone Dance: Cortisol & Melatonin



1

Cortisol

Your morning wake-up hormone that energizes your body and mind

2

Melatonin

Your evening sleep signal that prepares your body for rest

Light exposure, chronic stress, and irregular habits disrupt this delicate balance, compromising sleep quality.

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The 12-3-2-1-0 Sleep Rule: Your New Nightly Routine

1

12 Hours Before Bed

Cut off all caffeine sources including coffee, chocolate, and certain medications to prevent stimulation when you're trying to wind down.

2

3 Hours Before Bed

Stop eating and drinking alcohol to prevent digestive discomfort and REM sleep disruption that can fragment your sleep cycles.

3

2 Hours Before Bed

End all work-related activities and reduce screen time to lower anxiety levels and minimize exposure to sleep-disrupting blue light.

4

1 Hour Before Bed

Eliminate all screens completely to support your body's natural melatonin production and prepare for deep sleep.

5

0 Times

Never hit the snooze button – it fragments your final REM sleep cycle and triggers a stress response in your body.

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Sleep Hygiene Essentials: Habits That Transform Your Nights

Consistent Schedule

Go to bed and wake up at the same time daily—even on weekends—to regulate your body's internal clock.

Bed Association

Use your bed only for sleep and intimacy to build strong mental associations that trigger sleepiness.

Nap Management

Avoid naps entirely or limit them to 20 minutes and before 3pm to preserve nighttime sleep drive.

Pre-Sleep Ritual

Create a relaxing 20-30 minute routine: gentle reading, meditation, or light stretching to signal sleep time.



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Optimize Your Sleep Environment



Temperature

Keep your bedroom cool (60-67°F) to facilitate the natural drop in body temperature that triggers sleep.



Sound Control

Consider white noise or ambient sounds like rainfall to mask disruptive environmental noises.



Darkness

Use blackout curtains and remove digital clocks from view to eliminate sleep-disrupting light sources.



Evening Light

Dim lights and use amber glasses in the evening to block blue light that suppresses melatonin production.



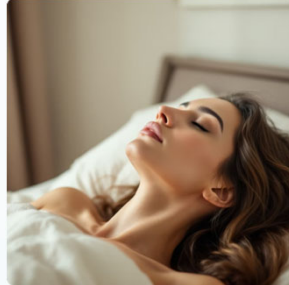
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Relaxation & Lifestyle Tips for Better Sleep



Evening Bath

Take a warm bath 1-2 hours before bed to lower core body temperature and trigger sleepiness as your body cools down.



Relaxation Techniques

Practice progressive muscle relaxation or deep breathing exercises to reduce stress and prepare your mind for sleep.



Physical Activity

Exercise regularly but avoid strenuous workouts within 4 hours of bedtime if they interfere with falling asleep. **Some people can workout before bed without issues.**



Mindful Eating

Maintain a balanced diet with sleep-promoting foods like tart cherries, kiwi, and fatty fish while avoiding stimulants near bedtime.

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Your Path to Restful Nights Starts Now



- **Start Small**

Implement one tip tonight and gradually build powerful sleep habits over time.

- **Be Consistent**

Your secret weapon for lasting sleep improvement is maintaining your routine every day.

- **Seek Help When Needed**

If sleep problems persist despite your efforts, consult a healthcare professional for personalized support.

- **Remember the Rewards**

Better sleep delivers improved health, mood, cognitive function, and overall quality of life.

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Why You Can't Fall Back Asleep

Waking in the middle of the night can be frustrating, but understanding the common culprits is the first step to regaining control of your sleep.

Environmental Disruptions

Noise from outside, a room that's too hot or cold, or even a sliver of light can interrupt your sleep and make it hard to drift back off.

Screen Time Exposure

Checking your phone or other devices during a middle-of-the-night wake-up blasts your eyes with blue light, suppressing melatonin and signaling your brain to wake up.

Physical Discomfort

Pain, heartburn, needing to use the restroom, or other bodily sensations can pull you out of sleep and keep you awake.

Late-Night Stimulants

Caffeine consumed too late in the day, alcohol disrupting REM sleep, or heavy meals close to bedtime can all lead to fragmented sleep.

Bed Partners

Partner that is too warm, too cold, too noisy, moves around. This include pets!

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Racing Thoughts & Anxiety

Your mind replaying the day's events, worrying about tomorrow, or simply being unable to quiet down can trigger a full state of alertness.

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Multi-tasking

The human mind and brain lack the architecture to perform two or more tasks simultaneously. By architecture, we mean the cognitive and neural building blocks and systems that give rise to mental functioning.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7075496/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20multitasking%20is%20almost,give%20rise%20to%20mental%20functioning.>

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Techniques to Fall Back Asleep When Your Mind Is Racing

The 4-7-8 Breathing Method

Inhale quietly through your nose for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds, then exhale completely through your mouth for 8 seconds. When you lose focus, start again!

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Techniques to Fall Back Asleep When Your Mind Is Racing

Body Scan Meditation

Starting at your toes, focus your attention slowly upward through your body, consciously relaxing each muscle group as you go.

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Techniques to Fall Back Asleep When Your Mind Is Racing

Worry Journal

Keep a notepad by your bed to quickly jot down racing thoughts, acknowledging them and promising to address them tomorrow.

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Techniques to Fall Back Asleep When Your Mind Is Racing

Get Up Briefly

If you can't fall back asleep within 20 minutes, leave your bedroom and do something relaxing with dim lighting until you feel sleepy again.

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Triangles: Mastering Breathing Variations

When you find yourself awake with a racing mind, manipulating your breath can be a powerful tool to calm your nervous system and guide you back to sleep. Experiment with these variations of the 4-7-8 method to find what works best for you.

01

The Classic 4-7-8

Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8. This foundational technique is designed to relax the body and quiet the mind by increasing oxygen to the parasympathetic nervous system.

02

Reversed 8-7-4

Try reversing the sequence: inhale for 8, hold for 7, exhale for 4. This variation can sometimes offer a different rhythm that your body finds more soothing or engaging.

03

Even Pace 5-5-5

For a steady, rhythmic approach, inhale for 5, hold for 5, exhale for 5. The equal duration for each phase can create a meditative, consistent flow.

04

The Ladder Technique

Start small and gradually increase: begin with 4-5-6, then progress to 5-6-7, 6-7-8 and then reverse it to 8-7-6, then 7-6-5 using whatever high and low numbers that are comfortable for you.

05

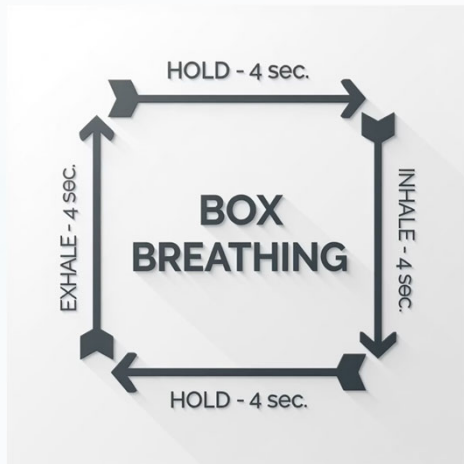
Descending Sequence 7-6-5

Begin with a slightly longer inhale and progressively shorten the exhale: inhale for 7, hold for 6, exhale for 5. This can help to gently wind down your system.

Remember, the goal is not perfection, but to redirect your focus and engage your parasympathetic nervous system. If you lose count, simply start over. Consistency in practice will enhance their effectiveness.

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Box Breathing



- **Comfort is Key**

Only use this technique if it is comfortable for you. Never force a breath or hold that causes discomfort.

- **Vary Your Timing**

Just like with Triangle Breathing, feel free to vary the duration of each side of the "box" to find what best suits your rhythm.

- **Gentle Return**

If your mind wanders, gently bring your focus back to your breath and start the technique again from the beginning.

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Counting

When your thoughts won't settle, engage your mind in a rhythmic, repetitive task that requires just enough focus to distract from racing thoughts, but not enough to fully awaken you.

01

The Core Method

Begin counting up by sevens or eights, silently in your head. The key is to keep it consistent and steady.

02

Increase the Challenge

If it becomes too easy and your mind starts to wander, try starting from a less conventional number, such as 11 or 104.

03

Vary the Pattern

Introduce an alternating rhythm: add seven, then add eight, then seven again, and so forth, to keep your brain engaged.

04

Reset and Continue

Should your mind drift or you lose your place, gently guide your focus back and restart from your last remembered number. It's about the process, not perfection.

05

Personalize Your Count

Feel free to adjust the numbers (adding or subtracting a few) as needed to maintain the optimal level of mental engagement without becoming stimulating.



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What If I Don't Like Numbers?

If counting or numerical sequences don't resonate with you, don't worry! There are many other effective techniques to quiet your mind and ease back into sleep that don't involve a single digit.



Guided Imagery

Transport your mind to a serene, calming scene. Visualize a tranquil beach, a quiet forest, or a starry night. Engage all your senses in this imagined place, focusing on the details to draw your mind away from racing thoughts.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Starting from your toes and working up to your head, systematically tense each muscle group for a few seconds, then completely release the tension. Notice the contrast between tension and deep relaxation as you move through your body.



Sensory Focus

Rather than engaging in mental calculations, bring your attention to the simple, physical sensations of being in bed. Feel the texture of your sheets, the warmth of your blanket, or the gentle rise and fall of your breath. Let these grounding sensations anchor you to the present moment.

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Patience & Persistence: Your Sleep Journey

Mastering the art of falling back asleep takes time and practice. It's not about perfection, but about cultivating a supportive mindset and consistent effort. Embrace these guiding principles as you explore new techniques:

Embrace Imperfection

Release the pressure to sleep perfectly every night. Accept that some nights may be restless, and that's okay. Focus on the effort, not just the outcome.

Give Yourself a Pep Talk

If anxiety creeps in, gently remind yourself that you are actively trying new methods. Acknowledge your efforts and redirect your thoughts back to the chosen technique.

Commit to Consistency

To truly evaluate a technique, commit to practicing it for at least 3-4 consecutive nights. This allows your mind and body to adapt and build a new association.

Trust the Process

With consistent practice, your nervous system will begin to associate these relaxation techniques with sleep, making it easier to drift off over time. Your body is learning a new skill.

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The Sleep Anxiety Trap

- ❌ The paradox of sleep: The more you worry about not sleeping, the harder it becomes to drift off.

This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, trapping you in a cycle of wakefulness and frustration. Acknowledge these worries, but then gently release them.



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Leveraging Tools for Optimal Sleep

Beyond traditional sleep hygiene, a variety of modern tools and ancient techniques can support your journey to more restful nights. Explore these options to find what resonates with your personal sleep needs.



Sleep Tracking Apps

Utilize smartphone or smartwatch apps to monitor your sleep cycles, duration, and quality. These tools provide valuable insights into your nightly patterns, helping you identify trends or areas for improvement that you can discuss with a sleep professional.



Meditation & Mindfulness Apps

Apps like Calm or Headspace offer guided meditations, calming soundscapes, and sleep stories. These resources are designed to quiet a racing mind, reduce pre-sleep anxiety, and gently guide your body into a state of relaxation conducive to sleep.



White Noise

White noise creates a consistent, monotonous sound that masks sudden disturbances like traffic or snoring. This steady auditory environment can help you fall asleep faster and maintain uninterrupted sleep by providing a predictable sound backdrop.



Brown Noise

Deeper than white noise, brown noise sounds more like a strong, consistent rumble, similar to heavy rainfall or a low-frequency hum. Many find its lower tones more soothing for focus and relaxation, making it effective for blocking out distractions and promoting sleep.



Fan Running

Beyond its cooling effect, a fan provides consistent airflow and a steady, low hum that acts as natural white noise. The subtle vibration and consistent sound can create a calming environment, drowning out minor disturbances and aiding sleep onset.



Night Noises

Calming natural sounds like gentle rain, a babbling brook, a distant waterfall, or crickets chirping can create a tranquil backdrop. These nature-inspired soundscapes help to mask disruptive noises and promote a sense of peace, guiding you toward restful sleep.



Solfeggio Frequencies

These specific sound frequencies are believed by some to promote healing, relaxation, and emotional balance. Incorporating them into your pre-sleep routine, often through specialized audio tracks, can create a deeply calming atmosphere that encourages rest.



Binaural Noise

Binaural beats occur when you hear two slightly different frequencies in each ear, and your brain perceives a third, "binaural" tone. These tones are believed to influence brainwave states, and specific frequencies (like delta or theta waves) are associated with relaxation and deep sleep, potentially guiding your brain into a sleep-conductive state.



Acupressure

Rooted in traditional Chinese medicine, acupressure involves applying gentle pressure to specific points on the body to release tension and promote relaxation. Key points, like those on the wrist or foot, can be stimulated to calm the nervous system and induce sleepiness.

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Further Reading & Resources

To deepen your understanding of sleep science and explore the topics discussed in this presentation, here are some valuable resources:

- [Women's Health Magazine: Best Sound for Sleep](#) Discover the science behind using various sounds like white noise, brown noise, and pink noise to improve sleep quality and create a more restful environment.
- [Medical News Today: What is Pink Noise?](#) Delve into the benefits of pink noise, a specific frequency often found in nature, and how it can help synchronize brain waves for deeper, more restorative sleep.
- [Sleep Foundation: Binaural Beats for Sleep](#) Learn about binaural beats and their potential role in guiding brain activity towards states conducive to relaxation and sleep, offering a unique auditory approach to improve rest.