



SLEEP

# Sleep

In addition to a well managed diet of healthy nutritious foods; training consistency and performance tracking have proved invaluable to monitoring and improving performance. In order to take some of the guesswork out of our training we can also consider managing recovery between training sessions, primarily by managing sleep.

Every athlete requires a minimum of 8 hours of sleep each night. Reducing this duration has significant repercussions on performance, consistency and adaptation and produces negative effects on training and health. These negative effects include: up to a 30% decrease in cardiovascular power output, significantly increased risk of injury, impaired learning/memory, reduced rate of adaptation to training, increased inflammatory markers and a significantly lowered immune system ie. more sick days. As such it is important to recognise sleep as a cornerstone of any program to develop health and wellness; here are a few tips to help you get the right amount of sleep.

## Sleep Schedule

Just like training and nutrition: the most effective results come from consistency. Set an alarm for bedtime and avoid large disparities in your bedtimes from workweeks to weekends. It's important to note that you can't catch up on missed sleep: lying in on the weekend doesn't help recoup missed sleep during the week.

## Training Late

If you train within 2 hours of bedtime, the rise in body temperature can make it difficult to nod off, your body needs to cool to induce sleep, having a bath or shower can help manage your core temperature by sending blood to the extremities.

## Caffeine and Nicotine

No mysteries here: coffee, tea and chocolate all contain caffeine or related compounds which take up to 8 hours to metabolise; so do the maths and figure out if it could impact your sleep quality.

## Alcohol

Night caps may help you relax; but heavy use will rob you of REM sleep, keeping you in lighter stages of sleep and robbing your brain of time to develop neural connections and form memories of new coaching cues, movement patterns and overly elaborate whiteboard descriptions.

## Midnight Feast

An obvious one. Large meals and beverages at night can cause indigestion, heart burn and the need to pee.

## **Medicines**

Avoid medicines that can delay/interrupt sleep - cough medicines often contain stimulants, anxiety medication and other sedatives rob you of deep sleep, read the label and know what you're taking. It's a common myth that sleeping pills help sleep, you are actually sedated and consistent use damages memory and the ability to retain new information. This includes 'natural' supplements like melatonin, which turns out to be a placebo.

## **Napping**

Don't nap after 3PM. Napping reduces the amount adenosine built up during the day, decreasing sleep pressure, a late afternoon nap can result in difficulty getting to sleep at your regular bedtime.

## **Bedtime Ritual**

Make time to relax before bed: reading, listening to music/podcast, take a bath, have a bedtime ritual to aid your sleep.

## **Sleep 'Hygiene'**

Make sure your bedroom is dark, cool and gadget free. This is a tough one, get rid of anything in the bedroom that might distract you. Turn phones face down, cover standby lights and buy blackout blinds. If you suffer from insomnia be sure to remove any visible clocks to prevent anxiety about the time.

Try to expose yourself to the right kind of light at the right time. Wake up to bright lights and strive to get an hour of exposure to sunlight during the day. Avoid blue light in the evening: LEDs, phone screens and TV's all emit wavelengths of light that block melatonin production, set phones and computers to a night light or use blue light blocking covers. Evolution conspiracists suggest this sensitivity harks back to our species'early origins in the ocean.

On a final note, if you are struggling to sleep, feel stressed or anxious; get up. Read, do a low intensity chore, listen to something like an audiobook then when you begin to feel sleepy go back to bed. The stress from trying to sleep can often be what prevents you from obtaining some sweet slumber.

**Iain-Barbour, CCFT-L3**