

Module 18 Transcript

A Life Built For Sleep

Doctors and qualified sleep experts talk a lot about a wind-down period--that time before bed meant to usher your waking mind toward a context for restful sleep. And while this period is important, it's only part of a larger conversation around your habits and decisions throughout the day, and the sleep cycles that follow. Because like all the other facets of mental fitness, sleep is interconnected with all aspects of your lifestyle, and what you do throughout the day can create a continuous feedback loop that affects the quality of both your resting and waking hours. So let's rewind, and walk through a day built for amazing sleep, and further examine what healthy sleep looks like.

In the last section, we mentioned Jen. As she settles into bed and closes her eyes, she begins to move from a state of wakefulness to the first stages of sleep. Her breathing rate slows. Her body temperature drops. Inside her head, her brain waves begin to shift, all leading toward deeper stages of sleep.

Let's rewind to the previous morning. Jen wakes up at 8:00am, to a soft alarm. She opens the curtains and window to take in the light. For breakfast, something nutritious, maybe something containing a good amount of magnesium--think a smoothie with almonds, spinach, and blueberries or a breakfast taco with black beans-- as the mineral magnesium has been shown to create a sense of calm and improve sleep disorders. She hydrates, and heads outside.

Phase 2 sleep, and Jen's brain waves change.

Sometime earlier in the day, Jen exercises outside. Nothing overly intense--in fact, many studies have shown that moderate aerobic activity has a bigger impact on sleep quality than intense, vigorous workouts. The aerobic activity she does during the day, and the

Module 18 Transcript

sleep she gets later at night, exist in a state of bidirectional support, one improving the other. The workout prepares her body for normal rest, which in turn rejuvenates and reenergizes the body for the next day.

Jen's in phase 3, or deep sleep. It's during this part of the sleep cycle that she's intensely difficult to wake up, and the brain begins to produce the delta waves we associate with late-cycle sleep. Here, the body and mind begin recovery in earnest, and this deep-state sleep is connected to increased productivity in the immune system, and while the brain activity is reduced during this time, phase 3 sleep bolsters creativity, mood, insightfulness, and outlook. Some new research also suggests that our brain's glymphatic system does some of its most vigorous cleansing and waste clearance during this phase of sleep. In fact, deep sleep has become the phase of my own sleep that I pay the most attention to, moving beyond just trying to get those solid eight hours, and really focusing on the amount of deep sleep that I get every night.

It's two hours before sleep, and Jen begins her wind-down ritual. She drinks a cup of chamomile tea, which, for her, acts as a signal that it is time to initiate the sleep process. Jen has done her research and knows that in one study, about 80% of participants responded favorably to incorporating chamomile into their respective sleep routines.

Entering REM sleep, the muscles are temporarily paralyzed, save for the eyes, which flick back and forth, hence rapid eye movement. REM sleep is foundational to creative thinking, problem solving, memory, mood, and cognitive learning. It's here where the majority of dreams take place, and the brain's activity increases--working, organizing, and cleaning.

As Jen prepares to go to sleep, she prepares her room. Her sheets are clean, the temperature is cool. There's no television or other electronics, in fact those have been off for over an hour. There's no distractions. Simply-- rest.

In total, Jen experiences roughly four to six full sleep cycles throughout the night, totaling about seven to eight hours, and these cycles leave the brain feeling refreshed and alert. But

Module 18 Transcript

remember, just like with nutrition, or exercise, or any routine, the key is to create permanent patterns that work for you. Sleep shouldn't be seen as a chore, but rather as an enjoyable aspect of your mental fitness. Yes, there are some consistent key tips: a more consistent sleep schedule, more natural daylight exposure especially early in the morning, avoiding reliance on substances like alcohol or medications, and the list goes on. But at the end of the day, the real answers come from identifying the central choices that help you to live your own life in a more compelling, more joyful, more energetic way, that promotes you getting the sleep that your brain so desperately needs.