



QUICK-FIRE GUIDE: TO BETTER SLEEP

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QUICK-FIRE GUIDE: TO BETTER SLEEP - A CREATIVE PERSON'S GUIDE

SLEEP MATTERS. THE AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF SLEEP WE HAVE WILL AFFECT OUR THINKING, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTH. STUDIES SHOW THAT LONG-TERM SLEEP DEPRIVATION IS CONNECTED TO HEART FAILURE, STROKE, DIABETES AND OBESITY. IT BADLY IMPAIRS OUR THINKING AND PERFORMANCE TOO.

Your sleep is not an optional extra. It is a key to better health, increased vitality, resilience and a more creative life.

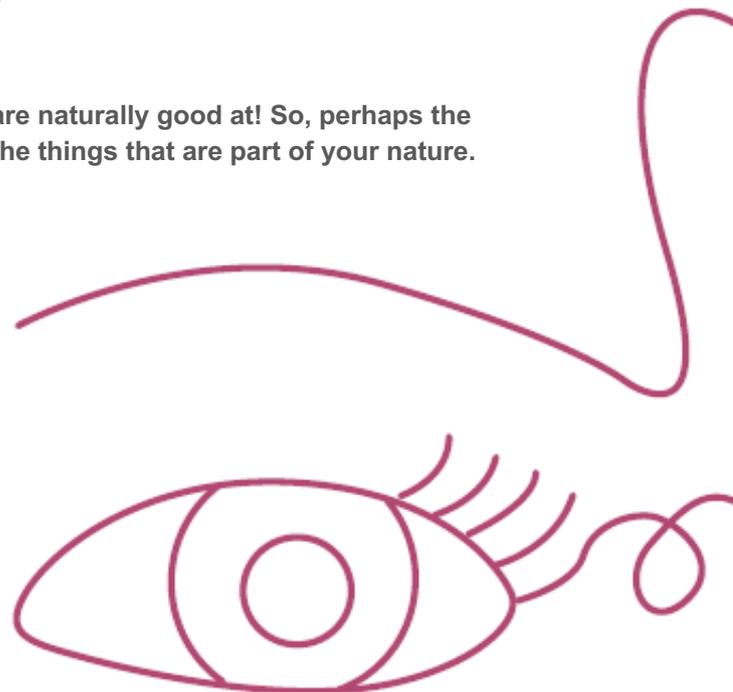
Creative people need more sleep than others. The intensity with which they lead their lives makes that switch-off time all the more urgent: the dream time, to de-arouse the day's impressions that have not been fully deactivated and sweep the memory plate free of unnecessary memories, in combination with the deep sleep that produces growth hormones and repairs body damage.

I hope this guide to better sleep will encourage you to honour your daily need for sleep, and that some of the ideas will facilitate and satisfy the process.

Perhaps they'll lead you to better ideas of your own. Notice how soon your mind sharpens, your focus increases and you feel re-inspired by life.

By the way:

Notice how all these tips are things creative people are naturally good at! So, perhaps the guide to better sleep just asks of you to do more of the things that are part of your nature.



DAYTIME ACTIVITIES



1. **YOUR BODY WAS BUILT TO BE USED.** Get daily exercise - even if only by walking to places, getting off the bus a stop earlier than usual and walking the extra mile; take the stairs instead of the lift as often as possible. Movement and mental health go hand in hand.



2. **EXPOSE YOURSELF TO DAY LIGHT AND FRESH AIR.** Look up at the sky, smell the air, feel the rain and the sun. Become conscious of the world around you! This helps to get a perspective on your preoccupations and feel more connected with the world around you, an important antidote to the feeling of isolation that many people suffer from.



3. **EAT WELL.** Reduce your sugars, refined carbs and caffeine. Bingeing on these shortcut energy boosts ultimately leads to illness and a shorter life.



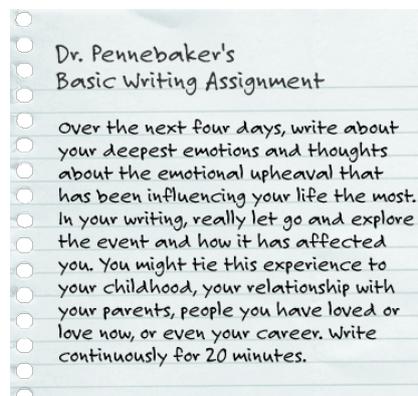
4. **MODERN PEOPLE SPEND AVERAGE OF 6-7 HOURS A DAY ON THEIR SCREENS.** If that describes you, it's time to rebalance your life. The experience of life in the physical world is what shapes us and determines who we become. Life in the digital world is not a real life experience.

Find time to 'play' - do different things in the non-digital world.

Studies show that part-time workers have sharper minds than people who are full time on a job. By alternating activities and interests we sleep better and do better. Get on with gardening, cooking or painting. Experience the shifts of mind-set that comes from exposure to art, literature or music. Do things that allow you to be!



5. **GET OUT OF THE WORRY LOOP BY MAKING TIME IN THE DAY FOR WHAT REALLY AFFECTS YOU!** A long-standing research project by [James Pennebaker](#) discovered that when we are really affected by something, a simple writing task (as described below) for just 10 minutes a day, for 4 days, can reverse the undermining effect of simmering worry. He found tangible health benefits attached to the activity. Here it is how you deal with your upset or worry:



6. **TURN OFF ALL DIGITAL SCREENS AND DEVICES 30–60 MINUTES BEFORE BEDTIME.** They deplete the body of melatonin which we need to sleep. If you really, really need your device

use a light filter such as Twilight. But listen to Ariana Huffington who says to definitely turn everything off at least 30 minutes before bed and not to keep any of these clever devices in your bedroom.



7. **HELP YOUR BODY CALM DOWN IN PREPARATION FOR SLEEP.** Try a warm bath with at least 4 big handfuls of Epsom Salts. Magnesium deeply relaxes your muscles and takes away a physical barrier to restful sleep.



8. **USE POWER NAPS.** Research findings from the Sorbonne show that daily short naps of 6 - 20 minutes make a big difference. They sharpen the mind, bring down stress levels and boost the immune system.



IDEAS FOR IN BED

Avoid rumination at all costs. The brain has an inborn negativity bias and creative people are particularly good at rehearsing scary 'what if...' scenarios in their mind. These imaginings will either keep you from falling asleep or make for an unsettled night.

The good news is that we can train our brains and build more positive and therefore relaxing mental loops, which can eventually overrule the preference for negative thought. Your biggest chance of success is if you use body and mind in tandem to achieve this.

Here are some ideas to relax your body and clear the mind of negativity:



BODYWORK

- **DO A BODY SCAN.** Lie on your back and check in with every body part, starting from your feet, to ankles, to shins etcetera, all the way to the top of your head. Explore each part carefully, both outside and in.
- **ANOTHER EFFECTIVE YOGIC EXERCISE** is to move up your body in the same way, **tensing and then relaxing each body part.** Slowly does it, really exploring and inhabiting every sensation. With a bit of luck you'll be asleep before you're done.



MIND WORK

- **SAVOUR THE BEST OF THE DAY**

- (1) Recall a few moments that moved you in some way. It may have been someone's kind gesture or smile, something funny your dog did, the smell of wet earth;
- (2) Bring the (small) moment back to mind in as much detail as you can;
- (3) Connect with the feelings of wellbeing the memory generates. They may be difficult to detect at first, but research shows that this practice hugely strengthens the positive mental circuits in our brains, bringing lots of positive consequences for physical and emotional health with it.

- **VISUALISE.** Just imagine yourself to be in a beautiful spot somewhere. Bring the experience to life for yourself and make it exactly how you want it. Make sure, again, to notice the effect this place or activity has on your body. Feel it relaxing you, opening up, softening, feeling lighter, more alive, or whatever is going on for you.

ABOUT RENEE



Renée van der Vloodt (M.A. , FHGI) is a psychotherapist and coach – and has had a private practice for over 20 years, which is now based in Woodchurch (near Ashford), Kent. She also works with people around the world via online sessions.

[Renée works with children and adults as a coach and therapist](#) to help them overcome life's challenges and emotional difficulties including stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anger or addictive behaviour.

Renée is a regular contributor to Breathe Magazine and the author of the [CD Calm the Chaos of the Creative Mind](#).

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