

Take care of your sleep

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO TAKING CARE OF YOUR SLEEP ROUTINE

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A Guide to Taking Care of Your Sleep: Practical Steps for Better Rest

Sleep is not just a nightly routine; it's essential for healing, restoration, and mental well-being, particularly for those facing anxiety, depression, or trauma. This guide combines insights from neuroscience, somatic practices, and spiritual wisdom to help you create healthier sleep habits.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEUROSCIENCE OF SLEEP

WHY SLEEP MATTERS FOR THE BRAIN:

Sleep plays a critical role in memory consolidation, emotional regulation, and recovery from trauma. Your brain uses sleep to process experiences, store information, and reset for the next day. Sleep deprivation increases the brain's stress response, making it harder to manage anxiety and depression. During deep sleep (NREM), the brain flushes out toxins and supports neuroplasticity, helping you to process emotions and build resilience.

Practical Neuroscience Tips:

Create a Consistent Sleep Schedule: Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. This trains your brain's internal clock, known as the circadian rhythm, to regulate sleep cycles effectively.

Wind-Down Routine for Brain Calming: Establish a 30-minute routine before bed to signal to your brain that it's time to rest. This could include reading, gentle stretching, or practicing mindfulness.

Dim the Lights: Darkness signals the brain to release melatonin, the hormone that helps regulate sleep. Turn off bright lights and screens an hour before bed to support natural melatonin production.

SLEEP AS SACRED REST: THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF REST:

Rest is seen as sacred in many spiritual traditions, including the Christian concept of Sabbath, which emphasizes intentional rest as a form of worship and renewal. Psalm 4:8 says, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety." This passage can be a reminder that sleep is an act of trust—releasing control and surrendering the day's burdens.

Practical Spiritual Tips:

Bedtime Prayer or Reflection: Begin or end your wind-down routine with a short prayer or moment of reflection. You can use it to release any anxieties or unresolved emotions to God, symbolically preparing your mind for peace and restoration.

Gratitude Journaling: Write down three things you are grateful for before bed. This shifts the brain's focus from stress to a state of contentment, helping to ease anxiety.

Affirm Rest as Sacred: Remind yourself that rest is not just a necessity but an act of honoring your body, mind, and spirit.

GROUNDING THE BODY: SOMATIC INTELLIGENCE FOR SLEEP

The Body's Role in Sleep:

Somatic intelligence refers to the awareness of physical sensations and how the body holds emotional stress. For those dealing with trauma, anxiety, or depression, the body often remains on high alert, making it difficult to relax into sleep.

Sleep disturbance is often linked to hyperarousal in the nervous system. Grounding and body-based practices can help regulate this.

Practical Somatic Tips:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Before bed, intentionally tense and release each muscle group, starting from your toes and moving up to your head. This helps signal to the nervous system that it's time to relax.

Grounding Breathwork: Practice slow, deep breathing (such as 4-7-8 breathing) to calm the body. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds. This activates the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress.

Body Scan Meditation: Lie in bed and slowly bring attention to each part of your body, noticing areas of tension and allowing them to soften. This practice brings awareness to the present moment and eases the transition to sleep.

Creating a Sleep-Supportive Environment

Your Sleep Environment Matters:

The space where you sleep plays a critical role in how easily you fall asleep and stay asleep. A cluttered, noisy, or uncomfortable environment can disrupt your ability to relax.

Practical Environmental Tips:

Declutter Your Sleep Space: Keep your bedroom free of distractions and clutter. A clean, calming space tells your brain it's time for rest.

Comfort Is Key: Invest in a comfortable mattress, pillows, and blankets. Ensure that the temperature in your room is cool enough for sleep (around 60-67°F is optimal for most people).

Noise and Light Control: Use earplugs or white noise machines if noise is an issue. Use blackout curtains or an eye mask to eliminate light disturbances.

MANAGING SLEEP DISRUPTIONS DUE TO TRAUMA OR ANXIETY

When the Mind Won't Quiet:

For those dealing with trauma or high anxiety, the mind may race at night, replaying stressful events or worrying about the future. This is a common experience, but it can be managed with patience and self-compassion.

Practical Sleep Strategies:

Nighttime Journaling for Anxious Thoughts: Keep a notebook by your bed and write down any lingering thoughts or worries before going to sleep. This can help clear your mind and release the need to hold onto these thoughts overnight.

Comforting Physical Objects: Having a weighted blanket or soft item to hold can provide a grounding sensation and offer comfort, especially for those whose trauma creates a sense of feeling unsafe.

Gentle Movement: If sleep doesn't come easily, rather than forcing it, try engaging in 5-10 minutes of slow, mindful movement such as yoga stretches. This releases physical tension that might be contributing to restlessness.

Nourishment for Sleep: Sleep-Supporting Nutrition

The Connection Between Diet and Sleep:

What you eat, especially before bedtime, can impact your sleep. Certain foods support sleep, while others can disrupt it.

Sleep-Inducing Foods: Incorporate foods rich in magnesium, such as leafy greens, nuts, and seeds, which help relax muscles. Foods like cherries and bananas also support melatonin production.

Avoid Caffeine & Sugar Late in the Day: Limit caffeine intake to the morning and avoid sugary snacks before bed, as these can interfere with sleep onset.

Hydration Balance: While staying hydrated is important, avoid drinking large amounts of liquid right before bed to minimize nighttime disruptions from bathroom trips.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR SLEEP

BUILDING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH SLEEP

Building a Healthy Relationship with Sleep Let Go of Sleep Perfectionism:

It's important to understand that sleep can ebb and flow, especially when managing anxiety, depression, or trauma. Rather than striving for "perfect" sleep, aim for compassionate sleep, which honors your body's needs without pressure.

Practical Somatic Tips:

Release Sleep Pressure: If sleep doesn't come immediately, remind yourself that resting in bed is still beneficial. Avoid checking the clock, as this can create anxiety around how much time you have left to sleep.

Affirmations for Rest: Repeat gentle affirmations like "I allow my body to rest" or "I release the day and trust my body to restore itself" to ease tension.

Conclusion: Sleep as a Path to Healing

Sleep is one of the most powerful tools for healing from trauma, anxiety, and depression. By integrating practices rooted in neuroscience, somatic awareness, and spiritual wisdom, you can nurture a healthy relationship with sleep. Honor the process, and know that improving sleep takes time, self-compassion, and patience.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR SLEEP

RESOURCES

BOOKS

The Restorative Power of Sleep: The Science and Practice of Restoring Your Body and Mind By Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith

This book examines the science behind sleep and offers practical advice on achieving restorative rest, with insights relevant to the Black community.

Self-Care for Black Women: 150 Ways to Radically Accept & Prioritize Your Mind, Body, & Soul By Oludara Adeeyo

This guide offers practical self-care strategies tailored for Black women, including approaches to improve rest and mental well-being.

The Little Book of Self-Care for Black Women: 200+ Ways to Rest, Reset, and Restore Your Mind, Body, and Spirit Also by Oludara Adeeyo

This companion book provides additional self-care tips, focusing on rest and rejuvenation for Black women.

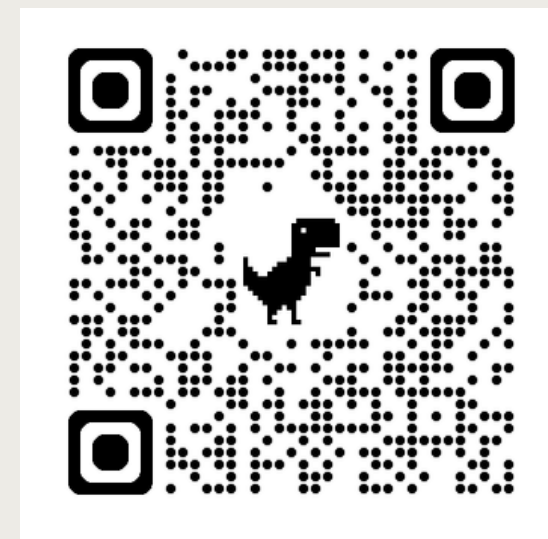
Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto By Tricia Hersey, founder of The Nap Ministry

This book explores the liberating power of rest as a form of resistance against grind culture, emphasizing its importance for Black individuals.

VIDEOS



What's Really Keeping You Awake



Sleep Hygiene



Thank you!

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