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A *Good* Night's Sleep: Stress Management for Nurses

by BRIAN LUKE SEAWARD, PhD

Everyone deserves a good night's sleep. Nurses are no exception. Current research published by the National Sleep Foundation states that more than half of Americans do not get a good night's sleep (NSF, 2017). Nurses are no exception, particularly those who rotate through evening shift work, a period normally dedicated to quality sleep.

While there are many factors associated with poor sleep quality and insomnia (e.g., medications, menopause, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome), emotional stress contributes to

the lion's share. Estimates suggest that more than 50 percent of all insomnia is attributed to emotional stress, for example anxiety and frustrations (Seaward, 2017).

Research suggests that poor sleep quality, interrupted sleep patterns, and chronic insomnia are the result of chronic stress, including unrelenting thought processes more commonly known as "monkey mind" or "restless mind syndrome." Financial worries, relationship struggles, work/career issues, parenting challenges, and chronic health issues top the list of concerns constantly streaming through our heads. For

this reason, excellent stress management skills are essential for round-the-clock health, including a toolbox of effective mind-body-spirit coping skills and relaxation techniques like diaphragmatic breathing exercises. It is important to note that sleep medications may induce sleep but not the deep sleep stage necessary for glial cell restoration (Gross, 2017; Walker, 2017).

Technology has contributed a new factor to the insomnia equation, compounding the stress problem. In the past 10 years, a new type of stress has added to the critical mass of poor sleep quality: digital devices, social media, screen addictions, and all the emotional (ego) stress that accompanies these activities. Constant information grazing and social media voyeurism may lead to the neuroplasticity of “digital monkey mind.” In addition, using digital devices before bed disrupts our sleep patterns.

The pineal gland regulates the body’s internal clock, more commonly known as circadian rhythms. It is greatly affected by the light/darkness cycle. It also produces melatonin, the sleep hormone. As natural light diminishes, serotonin decreases and melatonin increases, setting the physiological wheels in motion for sleep. Evening artificial light negatively impacts the production of melatonin. Digital devices greatly compound this problem. Research now proves that the blue light in the spectrum of light from the digital display greatly negates the pineal gland’s ability to produce melatonin (Harvard Health Letter, 2012).

As quality sleep is compromised, so is one’s health, from the attention span to the role of glial cells and the integrity of the immune system. Digital apps that control screen light during the evening hours are not the best answer (screen time still promotes monkey mind). Additional studies conducted by several European researchers suggest that weak magnetic frequencies (ELFs), such as those emitted by Wi-Fi routers, also negate the pineal gland’s ability to regulate melatonin (Brendel, Niehaus, & Lerchl, 2000). Turning off the Wi-Fi router an hour before going to bed is just one of many ways to implement better sleep habits (see box below). Making the bedroom a digital-free zone is a key step to practicing good sleep hygiene.

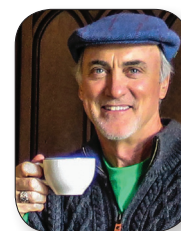
The practice of healthy boundaries is essential for quality sleep, including effective relaxation skills and proper sleep hygiene. Sleep is becoming recognized as a paramount health issue as experts realize the critical association between a consistent good night’s

sleep, a healthy immune system, and essential cognitive function in the waking hours. Make a sound-sleeping practice one of your top health priorities.

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Brian Luke Seaward, Ph.D. is recognized internationally as an expert in the fields of Stress Management and Corporate Health Promotion and is the author of many books, including *A Good Night Sleep*. His acclaimed Holistic Stress Management Instructor Training workshop is an “Endorsed CNE Program” through the AHNA.



Tips for Getting a Good Night’s Sleep

Experts suggest the following for better sleep habits:

- ✓ Institute a media curfew two hours before bedtime
- ✓ Turn off the Wi-Fi router an hour before you sleep
- ✓ Develop a daily habit of meditation
- ✓ Decrease caffeine consumption
- ✓ Engage in regular cardiovascular exercises daily
- ✓ Work to resolve emotional stressors that rob quality sleep

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