

Episode 37 – You Snooze...You Win! Tips to Improve Your Sleep, Your Health, and Your Life

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, episode number 37.

Welcome to the TD Fitness Podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

What's up guys? Welcome back to the TD Fitness channel and podcast. This is episode number 37, You Snooze, You Win, tips to improve your sleep, your health, and your life. So, recently, I started a new job, a job that has me basically getting to work a little bit earlier.

I have to be at work by 6:30 every day, and actually by 6:00 one day of the week, and you know, I'm not a stranger to waking up early. Typically, I'll wake up between 4:30 and 5:15 during the weekdays anyway, but I could sleep in until, say, 6:00 on some days, before starting this new job. But now I have to be very, very diligent on getting to bed early enough to get the proper amount of sleep. And why is that? Well, because a lack of sleep can lead to problems and poor performance throughout the day, and over time, it can really mess us up.

So, let's be real here for a moment, though. You know, as the demands of life kind of forced me to prioritize my time and my efforts, sleep becomes the area where I often have to sacrifice, and I think we often do this, right? I mean, I'd rather spend time with the family than take time away to do tasks that I could do if I just stayed up later or got up earlier, and it's kind of the same with exercise, right? I mean, that's one of the first things to go from your schedule when you're strapped for time. But just like removing exercise from your routine will bite you in the long run, remove rest will do the same thing.

So let's dive into this a little bit. The research shows that poor sleep is, unfortunately, the rule rather than the exception when it comes to the American society, so much so that the CDC considers it a public health problem now, that's lack of sleep. And it's gotten progressively worse. So back, way back in 1910, over 100 years ago, people averaged about nine hours of sleep, but now, less than 30% of adults between the ages of 30 and 64 report getting more than six hours a sleep per night. So that's more than 30% of people get less than six hours of sleep per night, and approximately a quarter of all adults in the United States have some type of sleep or wakefulness disorder, as it's called.

And the studies consistently link short sleep duration to excess weight or weight gain, with about seven hours being the point where the weight gain starts. So if you're averaging less than seven hours of sleep per night, then you have a propensity, or a greater chance, of gaining weight. And sleeping five to six hours a night was associated with a more than 50% increased risk of weight gain. Those are some pretty staggering numbers.

But let's talk a little bit about why this is. And you know, my wife and I were discussing this just this week, actually. Now more than ever, there are so many demands on our time. I mean, there's a constant flow of and a rapidity of information, and I feel like that has just created the need for more of that. We have to know, now. We'd rather do now rather than later. It's go, go, go, and what suffers is that white space that used to be more prevalent in our schedules, the more restful time, the more sleep. I talked a little bit about this in episode number nine, the rest and recovery episode, where we discussed effective strategies for healthy living and longevity.

The issue, though, is that insufficient sleep means an increased risk of developing a host of other health concerns, so one of which is a decreased brain function. That's no surprise, right? You're less productive. You're less productive and you don't perform as well when you get less sleep. There's also a greater chance of literally falling asleep in the wheel, so getting in a motor vehicle or a car accident. But also, shorter periods of sleep are linked to abnormal growth and development in children and teens, and this is important, particularly for us parents, because we want to make sure that we're setting our children up to be as healthy as possible. Well, part of that starts with making sure that they get the adequate amount of sleep.

A lack of sleep is also linked to an increased risk of heart disease, and a lack of sleep is linked to poor immune and insulin responses. So think back, if you recall, back to episode number 29. That was the episode where we talked about hormones. And remember that insulin is a key player in metabolic function and weight control. So poor sleep results in higher than normal blood sugar levels, because the body is tired and is unable to effectively respond to insulin, and if poor sleep is something that occurs over and over again, if it's chronic, then the development of metabolic disorders is essentially inevitable. So a chronic lack of sleep can cause insulin dysfunction.

But there are other hormonal imbalances that come about from a lack of sleep as well. So, if you also recall from that same episode, episode number 29, that discussion on hormones, cortisol is another major player in the game of hormones, and cortisol should be high in the morning and decrease throughout the day. And if it's high at night, then you're going to have trouble falling asleep, because it inhibits another hormone, melatonin, which is the sleep hormone. And this is important because a few hours after melatonin is released, we produce growth hormone, which is literally also called the fountain of youth hormone. That's the one that makes us stronger, makes us leaner, fitter, faster, more immune, gives us better skin. All those good things that happen while you sleep are largely due to the melatonin that's released. But less sleep lowers that regeneration window, again, particularly over time.

And specifically, when we are sleep deprived, the hormones responsible for regulating our hunger and our fullness, or that satiety, become unbalanced, so ghrelin, the hunger hormone, that increases. Leptin, the hormone that tells us when we're full, that decreases and goes down. And the brain craves food, and usually, it's not the healthiest varieties of food. So consequently, your caloric intake increases, your caloric expenditure decreases, all due to a lack of sleep that results from a lack of motivation and mental and physical fatigue. It's a vicious cycle that can eventually lead to weight gain.

But even if you forgot all of that, which is not a good approach, but for simplicity's sake, let's just say, if you didn't even address the hormone part of this discussion, think about it this way. When we sleep less, we reduce our natural fasting period, so there's more of the day that we can consume calories. There's more of the day with an elevated insulin response, and again, going back to that hormone episode, episode number 29, those continuously elevated levels of insulin lead to weight gain, period. I mean, I

could stop right there. If this was a court case and lack of sleep was on trial, you as the jury would probably say, "Guilty as charged," right? That's all you really need to know.

But, we're going to keep going with this, because there are some things to consider with the lack of sleep. But, what does adequate rest give us? So let's look at the positive side of getting an adequate amount of sleep. So while sleep seems very peaceful and very restful, hopefully that's the way you think of it, it seems restful to us, there's actually a lot going on while you rest. So sleep is crucial in the repair and the maintenance of essentially all the systems of the body, both physical and psychological. Your body is repairing itself. It's recovering from the day. It's rebuilding itself, rebuilding muscle, rebuilding all of those functions that need to take place during a period of rest.

And the benefits of sleep are increased levels of energy. You have clearer thoughts. You're more alert. Your memory is better. And perhaps the greatest overall benefit of being well rested is the body's ability to fight disease and infections like the common cold. If you're trying to stay healthy and avoid getting sick, then one of the best ways to do that is to make sure you're getting adequate, regular rest. So sleeping is really your body's reboot, and with the right amount of rest, your body's better prepared to handle the tasks of the day's events, or of the next day, and you'll find that your mood is better too.

So what are some of the things that you can do to improve the quality of your sleep? So the quality of your sleep is really a function of several things, including the lighting, noise, the temperature of the environment. One thing you want to do is make the room as dark as possible, because it's natural for our bodies to rest during the nighttime hours, okay? So sleeping with the lights on could actually affect your internal clock and hamper the quality of sleep that you get. So you want to eliminate distractions like unnecessary lights. Remove or turn off the electronic devices. Cover that alarm clock before you go to bed. The circadian rhythm is most sensitive to those types of lights that are emitted from those electronics.

Also, opt for that darker room with a peaceful setting. So we actually have blackout curtains in the kids' rooms, to hopefully allow them to sleep as long as possible into the morning, so that we can get some extra rest, but a lot of people I know use blackout curtains in their bedrooms, and I think that's a great idea.

Aside from the lighting, you want to make sure the room is at a comfortable temperature. Typically, most sources recommend that you keep the room a little bit chillier than you normally would, because that tend to help people rest better. So, just reducing the temperature in your home, or maybe in the upstairs if your bedroom's upstairs, just reduce that temperature by a degree or two.

Also, evaluate the amount of noise that is coming into your room or your sleep environment. If you have to, add some white noise, or a fan, or something like that, to kind of get that humming effect and make you rest a little better. Another thing that you can do to help you sleep better or rest better is to avoid eating right before you go to bed. And you know, there's a long-held belief that eating before ... really close to bedtime will make you gain weight. I will tell you that that's debatable, but for some, the digestion process that would normally occur while you're resting, if you eat that close to bedtime, that can actually cause restlessness, and interrupt your sleep, and give you some disturbing dreams. That's not for everybody, but in some cases, that is true. So that's something to consider if it's one of the things that affects you.

Something you can do, also, to improve your sleep habits. Develop a routine, and that starts with really going to bed at a decent time, but do things that tend to relax you prior to bedtime, whether it's some kind of meditation, even reading a book, listen to some calming music. You don't want to go, go, go from the day's events, you know, full throttle, and then just try to lay down and crash, right? You want to kind of ease yourself into that.

Activity is also good for rest, so activity during the day I'm talking about, because that essentially makes you a little more tired as the day progresses, so that you're better able to get some rest at the end of the day. But, you do want to try to avoid working out too late in the evening, because that can make it difficult for you to fall asleep. That's another one of those things that is ... it varies from person to person, but some of the research does show that working out too late in the evening can make it difficult for some people to fall asleep at the end of the day.

Limit your caffeine before going to bed. So if it's too close to bedtime, you want to make sure you cut back on that caffeine, or don't consume caffeine at all really close to your bedtime. In last week's episode, we talked about limiting alcohol. So alcohol's a depressant, and it has sedative-like effects, which means it can make you fall asleep, but it also causes you to wake frequently during the night. So you want to limit your intake of alcoholic beverages before bed or late in the evening.

So those are some of the things that you can do to improve the quality of your rest, but now let's talk about quantity. That's one of the big questions that a lot of people want to know. How much sleep is enough? So, let's start with this. Getting just a few hours of sleep, night after night, with the hope of making up for it on the weekend, that is not a good strategy, okay? I'll just say that right now. You cannot make up for lost rest time. As the days progress, you'll find that your alertness continues to drop, your fatigue increases due to the effects of what's called cumulative fatigue, or multiple days with less rest than you need, and there's a difference between getting enough sleep to get by and getting optimal amounts of sleep. So chronic deprivation, as it's called, makes you more cranky, more susceptible to illness, as I mentioned earlier, and just less healthy overall.

So, how much sleep should we get? Well, the National Institute of Health recommends about seven to eight hours each night. This can be tough, especially when you consider a full-time work schedule, your responsibilities at home, such as those associated with the family or with kids, and the endless other tasks that tend to take up our time. And honestly, different people require different amounts of sleep. As we age, for example, we generally sleep for shorter periods of time than we do in our younger years. Optimally, you should really get enough sleep such that you can wake up on your own, that means before your alarm clock goes off. When you wake up naturally, there's a really good chance that you've gotten adequate rest.

Of course, if you have a timeline to meet in the morning, that means you may have to go to bed earlier. So, for me, I have a natural tendency to wake up six hours after I go to bed. In fact, if I stay in bed for more than about eight hours or so, my body physically starts to hurt. Like, my lower back does not feel good when I stay in bed for that long.

That said, you probably know if you're getting too little sleep or not enough rest. So, one way to increase your sleep, and improve your rest, is to start with minor changes. So don't try to add two hours a sleep per night. It's just like any other habit. You want to gradually ease your way into this, in order to make it a routine that you can maintain and one that you can stick with. So maybe just go to bed 15 or 20 minutes earlier than usual, and eventually, this is going to become your new normal, and then you can

improve it from there, by adding a little more for another couple of weeks, and then a little bit more, and then a little bit more.

So those are some of the tips with quantity and quality of sleep. I want to talk a little bit about REM and sleep cycles. So, simply put, there are two types of sleep. You have REM sleep and non-REM sleep. REM, or R-E-M, stands for rapid eye movement, because it's characterized by the eyes moving back and forth really, really fast, really frequently during this period of sleep. And most of your dreaming actually occurs during your REM sleep. The brain is much more active, and dreams can be fairly intense. And in REM sleep, the muscles become inactive and somewhat paralyzed. Adults spend approximately 25% of their sleep time in REM sleep. Babies spend up to 50% of their sleep time in REM sleep. And contrary to popular belief, REM is not the deepest level of sleep. In fact, it's closer to the lighter sleep end.

So, basically there are cycles that we go through in a night's sleep. So when we lay down to go to sleep, we go through several smaller sleep stages. We cycle from light sleep to deep sleep, and then back up through REM, or dream sleep, back to that light sleep, and it repeats itself over and over again. The cycle repeats several times throughout the course of the night, depending on the amount of sleep we get. So how long is this cycle? Well, a full cycle lasts for about 90 minutes in most adults. So with some planning, this 90-minute sequence, or 90-minute cycle, can actually be used to your advantage, because the body moves in and out of deep sleep once during this 90 minute period. That's a full cycle.

So it's best to wake up during the period of a lighter sleep, because you'll feel more refreshed. You'll feel more alert and less groggy. Think about how you feel when someone or something wakes you up from a very deep sleep. You feel kind of disoriented, right? And really tired. When that alarm goes off in the morning, the way you feel is largely dependent on the point where you were in your sleep cycle. Yes, the length of sleep, or the amount of sleep that you got over the course of the evening is important, but waking up during the lighter stages of sleep is also important, so you don't feel as tired. So there are times when a little less sleep may actually be better than more sleep.

So for example, and I do this all the time. I literally calculate this every single night. So, sleeping for six hours, for example, that would allow for an easier and more refreshed wake-up than six-and-a-half hours, because your body would go through four complete 90-minute cycles over the course of six hours, versus if you slept for six-and-a-half hours, now you're starting another sleep cycle and you're going back into your deep sleep, and you're going to wake up as you're entering that deep sleep at six-and-a-half hours. But that's not what you want. You want to wake up at the lighter sleep part that occurs around the six-hour point.

Similarly, seven-and-a-half hours could provide an easier wake-up than eight hours. So at night, what I'll do is I'll count back seven-and-a-half hours from the time I need to wake up in the morning. If I need to get up at 6:00 AM, for example, then I know that I need to be in bed and falling asleep by 10:30 PM, to get seven-and-a-half hours of sleep. And if I miss that 10:30 bedtime because I'm working, or I'm doing something else that's important, then I try to make the six-hour bedtime, by midnight. So I stick to the ... I try to stick to those increments of 90-minute cycles, and I really feel that it makes a noticeable difference. So that's a technique that you can use to feel a little less groggy in the morning. Remember, though, your first goal should be to get enough sleep, and then use those 90-minute sleep cycles to your advantage.

So wrapping things up here, you know, sleep is an important part of our lives. Although we have many family and work obligations, it is important to remember that we must take care of ourselves in order to

be able to function and to live up to those obligations. If you're not already doing so, then make sleep a priority over the next few weeks. You'll feel better, you'll feel more productive, and healthier.

And then finally, I dedicate an entire unit of study and allow you to practice this habit of better sleep as part of the FITLIFE program. That's how important this is to healthy living overall. And I'll put a link to that in the show notes. The show notes for this episode can be found at tdfitness.net/037. There, you'll also find links to all of the references that I made in this episode, and there are a couple of links to a couple of blog posts that I've written over the years, related to sleep. So, you can also listen, or watch, or read the transcript there on the show notes page. Again, that's tdfitness.net/037. And as always, as I sign out, I want to thank you guys so much for tuning in. You all have a blessed one. Coach T out.