



Sleep and Exercise – The Perfect Marriage

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Have you ever considered how your patterns of physical activity or inactivity impact your sleep? We often hear how our diet impacts sleep, but our patterns of exercise also make a big difference in whether we get a “good nights sleep.” The relationship works in the other direction as well, how we sleep effects both the quality and quantity of our physical activity.

Sleep issues are prevalent and the amount of media coverage in our country today underscores this public health problem. Author and syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington has an entire section of her popular web site, The Huffington Post, dedicated to sleep. MIIA Well Aware trainer, Paul Connolly, shares some helpful information about the “marriage” of sleep and fitness.

Exercise for better sleep and sleep for improved fitness:

Winding down and stretching before bed – Before bedtime, reduce levels of light, take a warm shower or bath, and practice a few calming stretches while engaging in deep, relaxed breathing. One particularly relaxing stretch is the Child Pose, [click](#) for instructional video. It helps reduce tension in the lower back and hips. In addition, the muscles along the sides of your torso receive a great stretch. Child Pose improves breathing mechanics so you take deeper, more relaxing breaths. It’s a wonderful way to relieve stress, particularly when encompassed in a ‘wind-down’ routine at night to facilitate optimum sleeping patterns.

When should I exercise? – This can vary from person to person. While many find exercising later in the day or evening disrupts their sleep, it's not true for everyone. For example, I tend to sleep better when I exercise at night. It's important to find your own pattern that will motivate you to exercise regularly, not just sleep well. The key piece of advice for my fellow 'night owls' is to conclude each workout with a proper cool-down to lower your heart rate and body temperature. Cooler body temperatures are associated with sleep onset. No matter what time you exercise, you may need to make exercise a more frequent activity. (This has a myriad of benefits anyway!) A 2013 study from *The Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* confirmed that you will likely need to exercise for a more prolonged period of time before you begin to see tangible results with your sleep particularly your deep 'REM' sleep.

Sleep and exercise are interrelated – Rejuvenating sleep and exercise truly form the perfect bond. For optimal workout performance, you must have good sleep. Strength will be compromised, endurance will be limited, and cortisol- a major stress hormone - will be heightened, without regular healthy sleep. And when you are fatigued, especially over time due to chronic sleep deprivation, you will likely feel you have no energy to exercise.

When you improve your sleep patterns, important and positive changes occur that will promote your physical and emotional wellbeing. So, stretch before bed and get regular physical activity at a time that doesn't disrupt your sleep. If poor sleep continues over time, I advise speaking to your doctor as there may be an underlying condition that may need to be treated.

