



The Stealth Wellness Weapon

It's not flashy, is often overlooked as a key player in wellness (hence the stealth title) and can either be one of your greatest wellness tools or weapons. Want to know what it is? SLEEP! Luckily, I have pretty smart newsletter readers who already recognize this and asked me to write on the topic. So here it goes...

I have to confess, this is the area of wellness that I struggle with the most. I've had sleep as one of my wellness goals for a year now. So if you struggle with sleep, you're not alone! However, if you think it's something that will remedy itself or that you can address at a later time (i.e. when the kids are older and not waking you up, when the project is done, when you get the next promotion, etc.) then read on because as you'll find, **sleep is one of our biggest wellness commodities!**

Why is sleep important?

While research on just how much sleep you need is mixed, as each person has their own ideal set point, there is growing consensus that not getting enough sleep is harmful to your health. We all have the occasional rough night or week. The problem is when sleep deprivation is the status quo. Sleep is when the body repairs itself and consolidates learning. It can affect physiological processes for hunger, stress, emotion, and immune system functioning. Sleep deprivation puts you at increased risk for a whole slew of problems from increased weight gain, heart disease, and memory problems to depressed immune system functioning. **So if you're doing all the "right" things in other areas of wellness but aren't paying attention to your sleep habits, then you could be thwarting your own best efforts.**

Common sleep mistakes

Most of you probably already knew sleep was important. But are you engaging in some of these habits that could be negatively impacting your sleep?

- Eating too late at night
- Not getting enough exercise
- Napping for longer than 10-20 minutes
- Making up for lack of sleep during the week by sleeping more on the weekends
- Using alcohol to help you fall asleep

- Watching TV or being on a computer (or other device that emits light) before bed
- Having too many (pets, kids, etc.) in the bed that might interrupt sleep
- Working right up until bedtime

So now that you are aware of what not to do, let's focus on some sleep solutions.

Basic Sleep Strategies

- Stick to a regular sleep schedule, even on weekends so your body's own circadian rhythm stays in sync
- Get off screens (TV, computer, tablets, phones) at least 1 hour before bed
- Create a calming, relaxing bedtime routine
- Keep your bedroom cool and dark
- Exercise to expend energy, but make sure you do it at least 3-4 hours before bed
- Have your last meal at least 2-3 hours before bed and make it a lighter one
- Address sources of interruption and if necessary, set boundaries to protect sleep

For other great basic sleep tips visit www.sleepfoundation.org or www.webmd.com/sleep.

The Real Issue

Our thinking about sleep needs to change. It's not like a scale where you take an amount away, put the same back in and you automatically come to a state of balance. Sleep affects many complex physiological processes that don't necessarily adjust that easily.

We live in a culture where productivity is glorified over health. I think for many, sleep deprivation is the norm. We are rewarded for doing things faster, better, or producing more. In this environment we feel pressured to put more things in our day, which usually means sleep is the first thing to go by the wayside. How many times have you told yourself, "I'll just do one more thing and then get to bed," only to have an hour pass? If you're a perfectionist (who me?) who likes everything off their "to do" list before the end of the day, this is especially challenging.

Instead, **we need to think of sleep as part of the foundation for wellness.** If you build on a shaky foundation, even if the remaining structure is strong, the building is likely to collapse. Sleep is the foundation, other health habits create the floors, thereby creating the whole "building" which is your health and wellness.

Action Challenge:

Think of a time when you felt really well rested. What conditions supported you getting a good night's rest? Notice how much sleep you got. What happened the night before to help you get high quality sleep? Notice your environment, the status of your thoughts/feelings, who you were with (or whether you slept alone), etc. If you need to, use a sleep diary to collect this

information. One can be found at <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-diary/SleepDiaryv6.pdf>. Use this information to determine your ideal number of hours of sleep and the conditions that facilitate high quality sleep. Now make it happen by using basic sleep strategies and following the suggestions below.

*** Consider sleep one of your biggest wellness investments and make it a priority.**

* Pick a time to stop work, accept calls or texts, or do things on your "to do" list. Use timers or alarms if you have to in order to avoid having time elapse without you being aware of it. Enlist the help of someone else if need be.

* Address any leftover "junk" from the day before you get in bed. By "junk" I mean feelings or thoughts that might keep you awake. For some people journaling is a great tool. For others it could be talking to a spouse or friend or engaging in spiritual practices. Think of an activity that helps you process thoughts and emotion, leaving you feeling lighter emotionally and with more mental clarity.

If you try many of these strategies and continue to struggle, it may be time to have a conversation with your doctor. Some medications can disrupt sleep as can depression, anxiety, and sleep apnea.

Will you make sleep a priority? If not now, what will it take? In a world that keeps demanding more it's easy to let sleep slide. Let me help you take a stand for sleep and create a foundation for wellness. Contact me for a free consultation today at shelly.horswill@gmail.com. Continue to check my Facebook page this month for more sleep tips and strategies.

I'm off to walk my talk and get off the computer before it gets too late. Here's to catching some high quality zzz's tonight!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shelly".

Live with Intention, Love Yourself, Create Balance, Fulfill Your Purpose & Thrive!