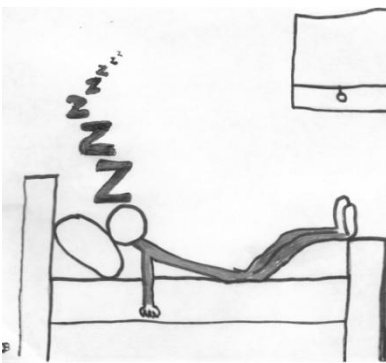


# To Sleep, To Rest and To Wake Refreshed!

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As the daughter of a pastor, I remember well his nightly prayer. “Lord, give us a good night’s sleep and wake us refreshed in the morning for Your service.” Experts estimate that 75% of Americans are not getting enough sleep. And ministers may be a good portion of the number of sleep-deprived adults in America. An adult needs seven to nine hours of sleep per night. All adults. Failing to get this much sleep has implications for both our health and productivity. The science is clear. Unless our bodies get enough sleep, they cannot repair and rejuvenate effectively. So don’t argue, get cracking on these practical tips for a good night’s sleep.

1. Wake up every morning at the same time. Staying up late on Friday night and sleeping in the next morning disrupts the sleep pattern of the brain. Make it a routine to be consistent in the time you go to bed and get up the next morning. Obviously, there will be nights when you cannot get to bed on time. Emergencies seem to be the norm in a minister’s life, but make the habit of a regular bedtime and regular wake time your goal.
2. Let the sunlight shine in within 15 minutes of waking. “Sunlight activates the brain,” according to the UCLA Sleep Disorders Center. Become more productive simply by exposing yourself to sunlight early in the morning. Open the blinds and thank God for a new day.
3. Get some exercise every day. If possible do so outdoors. Some studies suggest that exercise reduces the amount of time it takes to fall asleep and increases sleep time. It’s amazing that it doesn’t take a full workout to produce this good effect. The University of



Arizona studied the effect of exercise on sleep and concluded that walking as much as six blocks at a normal pace during the day improved sleep for women. But don’t postpone that walk to the end of the day. Finish your exercise at least two hours before going to bed.

4. Adjust your diet to accommodate better sleep. Oatmeal, whole-grain cereals and breads eaten well before bedtime may help to prevent a drop in blood sugar during the night and promote better sleep. Drink plenty of water or juice but avoid caffeine which blocks the sleep patterns and often gets you up in the night. Make lunch the biggest meal of the day and avoid spicy foods late in the day.

5. Wind down before going to bed. At least one hour before bedtime start a pre-bedtime routine. A homeschooling mother told of this amazing event. She had an established routine of listening to an audio book with her three children before bedtime. After an hour of listening, she put on “brush your teeth” music as a signal it was time to get ready for bed. Using this music eliminated the “get ready for bed” talk from mom and dad. One evening the audio book finished a full 30 minutes early, but her children immediately put on the bedtime music, brushed their teeth and hopped into bed! Amazing what having a routine does for the mind. This daily ritual signals the brain to get ready for sleep. Perhaps even having the same music playing sends that signal to the brain. A bedtime playlist wouldn’t be a hard thing to do. Try listening to quiet hymns as you brush your teeth and wind down. What a great pattern to set for your children. Teenagers are notorious about staying up late. Having this routine established for them as children will develop a life-long discipline.

6. Avoid stimulating data before bedtime. A good book is a great stress reliever, but be careful to select leisure reading that isn’t too stimulating. Never check your email before bedtime. Skip the nightly news and avoid late night talk shows. You simply cannot peacefully drift into a sound slumber on the cusp of world events, sarcasm or thrilling fiction.

7. Make your evening prayer time one of praise and thanksgiving for God’s hand on your life. Listing for Him all the ills you have experienced, counseled or heard of during the day does not solve those ills and robs you of the restful night you need to prepare for the next day. Leave it all with the Lord and dose off under His care. Leave the responsibilities of your job outside the bedroom. Experts agree that when work intrudes into our homes, the family suffers. Confine work to its proper place. End the day with gratitude and begin the new day with a list of blessings.

8. Make your bedroom a sanctuary for sleep. Clear the clutter, maximize your comfort with a good mattress, spritz a little lavender water on your pillows and leave the cell

*“Because Your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.  
I will praise You as long as I live,  
and in Your name I will lift up my hands.  
My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of  
foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise You.  
On my bed I remember You;  
I think of You through the watches of the  
night.  
Because You are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.”  
Psalm 63:3-7, NIV*

phone and computer in the other room. Experts suggest the ideal sleeping temperature may be 65 degrees.

9. If snoring is a problem, try these fixes. Lose some weight, sleep on your side to help open the airways, avoid smoking and get tested by a sleep expert. About half the people who snore badly have sleep apnea. Your doctor can suggest solutions ranging from minor adjustments to surgery.
10. As my grandmother often quoted, “Never go to bed angry.” Avoid difficult discussions at bedtime. Make it a point to tell your spouse how much you treasure them. As you say your prayers, include a list of the things about your spouse and family that bring you joy. Some parents make it a point to offer a nighttime blessing over their children. What a wonderful gift to give your children. Use scripture to put together the blessings appropriate for each child.
11. Develop sleep-friendly attitudes. Be grateful. Admit the importance of sleep. Acknowledge you cannot solve all the world’s problems. List the things that must be done in the following day so that your mind can rest assured you will remember to do everything necessary. If you wake in the night with a concern, write it down and go back to sleep.

*In vain you rise early  
and stay up late,  
toiling for food to eat –  
for He grants sleep to those  
He loves.  
Psalm 127:2, NIV*

by Judy Hughes  
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