

Military Method for Falling Asleep in Two Minutes

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- An estimated 70 million American adults have a sleep disorder, the most common of which is insomnia — the inability to fall asleep, or waking up one or more times during the night
- Even if you're doing everything else right, if you're not sleeping enough, or not sleeping well, many of the benefits of your healthy lifestyle will be lost
- Middle-aged men who sleep five hours or less per night have twice the risk of having a major cardiovascular event compared to men who sleep at least seven to eight hours per night
- A sleep-induction method developed by the U.S. military claims to have a 96 percent success rate after six weeks of consistent implementation. The method centers around preparing your mind and body for sleep by deeply relaxing for about two minutes
- There's evidence showing EMF exposure reduces melatonin production just like blue light from cellphones, tablets and computers do, making it particularly important to eliminate EMFs in your bedroom

An estimated 70 million American adults have a sleep disorder, the most common of which is insomnia — the inability to fall asleep, or waking up one or more times during the night. If you're in this category, despair not, because the list of strategies to improve your sleep is long.

While most sleep problems are tied to lifestyle choices such as spending too much time indoors during daylight hours, and/or excessive use of technology and chronic exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs), which will require you to make (perhaps significant) changes to your lifestyle, a number of tips and tricks can be useful in the short term.

A method developed by the U.S. military, revealed in the 1981 book, "Relax and Win: Championship Performance," claims to have a 96 percent success rate after six weeks of consistent implementation.

Military Method Preps Your Body for Sleep

The method centers around preparing your mind and body for [sleep](#) by deeply relaxing for about two minutes. The following summary of the process was recently published in the Evening Standard:²

1. Relax your whole face, including your tongue, jaw and the muscles around your eyes
2. Drop your shoulders and relax your arms
3. Relax your chest as you breathe out

4. Relax your legs, from your thighs to your feet

5. Relax and clear your mind, then picture yourself in one of the following scenarios:

a. You're lying in a canoe on a calm lake with nothing but blue sky above you

b. You're snuggled in a black velvet hammock in a pitch-black room

c. Simply repeat "Don't think, don't think, don't think" for 10 seconds

21 Additional Strategies to Help You Fall Asleep Faster

I've written numerous articles over the years, detailing all sorts of tips and tricks to help you fall asleep faster and improve the quality of your sleep. For an extensive listing of suggestions, see "[Sleep — Why You Need It and 50 Ways to Improve It.](#)"

Medical News Today also recently published a list of "21 Ways to Fall Asleep Naturally," which included the following:³

1. Create a consistent sleeping pattern by going to bed and getting up at the same time throughout the week, including on weekends
2. Make sure your bedroom is as dark as possible. If you don't have blackout shades, use an eye mask
3. Avoid taking naps during the day or too close to bedtime
4. Exercise regularly
5. Minimize cellphone use and use of other blue light-emitting devices
6. Read a book to relax before bed
7. Avoid caffeine and other stimulants at least four hours before bed
8. Meditate or practice mindfulness on a daily basis
9. "Count sheep" by slowly counting downward from 100 to zero
10. Avoid eating at least three hours before bedtime
11. Lower the temperature in your bedroom; an ideal temperature for sleeping is around 65 degrees F.
12. Use aromatherapy; lavender is relaxing and may help induce sleep

13. Find your most comfortable sleeping position. While the article suggests side sleeping, I would suggest you try sleeping in a neutral position — on your back with a pillow supporting your neck, not your head. For more information, see Dr. Peter Martone’s article on “[The Best Position for Sleep](#)”

14. Listen to relaxing music before bed

15. Don’t wait to use the bathroom; while it may seem distracting to get out of bed to pee, trying to hold it will simply disrupt your sleep later

16. Take a hot shower or bath before bed

17. Avoid e-books, as the blue light from the screen will impede melatonin release

18. Try a melatonin supplement. Another, perhaps even more effective alternative is 5-HTP, which is a precursor to both serotonin and melatonin. I believe this is a superior approach to using melatonin. In one study, an amino acid preparation containing both GABA (a calming neurotransmitter) and 5-HTP reduced time to fall asleep, increased the duration of sleep and improved sleep quality⁴

19. Invest in a comfortable mattress. To this, I would add the suggestion to look for a chemical-free mattress to avoid exposure to [flame retardant chemicals](#)

20. Minimize noise; use ear plugs if environmental noise is unavoidable

21. [Avoid alcohol](#)

Avoid Nighttime EMF to Improve Sleep Quality

While avoiding cellphones and other devices with electronic screens (including e-readers) is important to protect your melatonin production, another factor that can have a significant impact on your sleep quality is EMFs emitted from your home wiring.

There’s actually evidence showing [EMF exposure](#) reduces melatonin production⁶ just like [blue light from cellphones, tablets and computers](#) do, making it particularly important to eliminate EMFs in your bedroom.

EMF exposure also triggers neuronal changes that affect memory and your ability to learn,⁶ and harms your body’s mitochondria by producing excessive oxidative damage, so “marinating” in EMFs all night, every night, can cause or contribute to virtually any chronic ailment, including premature aging.

One of the easiest ways to avoid or radically limit your nighttime electric field exposure from the wiring in your room is to pull the circuit breaker to your bedroom before going to bed. Alternatively, have an electrician install a remote breaker for convenience, which is what I’ve done.

This will virtually eliminate electric fields in your bedroom, unless you have adjacent rooms with wiring in them, in which case you will need to measure the electric fields with a meter after you shut off the power to see if it goes into the lowest range. Another really important step is to turn off your Wi-Fi at night. Ideally, hard wire your home so you have no Wi-Fi 24/7 in your home.

Lack of Sleep Raises Your Risk for Heart Disease and More

A review of hundreds of sleep studies concluded that, as a general rule, most adults need somewhere between seven and nine hours — or right around eight hours — of [sleep per night to maintain good health](#).

Regularly getting less than seven hours per night has been scientifically linked to a wide array of health problems, ranging from weight gain⁷ to an increased risk for cancer. Most recently, researchers again confirmed that lack of sleep can over time take a significant toll on your long-term heart health.^{8,9} As reported by Medical Xpress:¹⁰

“Middle-aged men who sleep five hours or less per night have twice the risk of developing a major cardiovascular event during the following two decades than men who sleep seven to eight hours ...

Study author Ms. Moa Bengtsson, of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, said: ‘For people with busy lives, sleeping may feel like a waste of time but our study suggests that short sleep could be linked with future cardiovascular disease.

In our study, the magnitude of increased cardiovascular risk associated with insufficient sleep is similar to that of smoking or having diabetes at age 50.”

Men who got only five hours or less per night were also more likely to smoke, be inactive and overweight, have high blood pressure and diabetes. Other studies have shown insufficient sleep and/or poor quality sleep can increase your risk for:

Accidents at work and on the road — Getting less than six hours of sleep leaves you cognitively impaired. In 2013, drowsy drivers caused 72,000 car accidents in which 800 Americans were killed and 44,000 were injured.¹¹

Even a single night of sleeping only four to six hours can impact your ability to think clearly the next day.

Diabetes — One 2015 study¹² linked "excessive daytime sleepiness" with a 56 percent increased risk for [Type 2 diabetes](#).

Depression — More than half of people diagnosed with [depression](#) also struggle with insomnia. While it was long thought that insomnia was a symptom of depression, it now seems that insomnia may precede depression in some cases.¹³

Your amygdala, one of your brain's centerpiece regions for generating strong emotional reactions, including negative ones, becomes about 60 percent more reactive than usual when you've slept poorly or insufficiently, resulting in increased emotional intensity and volatility.

Impaired memory formation and increased risk of memory loss¹⁴ — Sleep is essential not just for cementing events into long-term memory, but also for making sense of your life. During sleep, your brain pulls together and extracts meaning, while discarding unimportant details. In fact, sleep increases your ability to gain insights that would otherwise remain elusive by about 250 percent.

So, during sleep, part of your brain is busy stabilizing, enhancing and integrating new memories. It's also extracting rules, and the "gist" of what's happening in your life. Reduced productivity at work and poor grades in school are other associated side effects of insufficient sleep. Creativity is also diminished.

Impaired sexual function — In one study,¹⁵ women with insomnia who were getting less than the recommended eight hours were found to be less sexually active after menopause. They also reported less sexual satisfaction overall.

Increased risk of pain and pain-related conditions such as fibromyalgia — In one study, poor or insufficient sleep was the strongest predictor for pain in adults over 50.¹⁶

Chronic diseases — Sleep deprivation decreases your immune function,¹⁷ which can have a snowball effect, raising your risk for cardiovascular disease,^{18,19} [Alzheimer's](#)²⁰ and cancer, just to name a few.

In the case of cancer, another critical mechanism involved is disrupted [melatonin](#) production. Melatonin is a hormone with antioxidant and anticancer activity.

It both inhibits the proliferation of cancer cells and triggers cancer cell apoptosis (self-destruction). Melatonin also interferes with the new blood supply tumors require for their rapid growth (angiogenesis). A number of studies have shown that night shift workers are at heightened risk of cancer for this reason.

Increased risk of dying from any cause — Compared to people without insomnia, the adjusted hazard ratio for all-cause mortality among those with chronic insomnia is 300 percent higher.²¹

Sleep and Athletic Performance

While being a sleep coach may sound like a strange career, indeed, they do exist, and are slowly starting to break their way into the world of professional sports. This makes sense, considering the impact sleep can have on your athletic performance, and the fact that many professional athletes travel and have to deal with [jet lag](#) to boot. As previously noted by The Atlantic:²²

"Without proper sleep, whether it's a short-term or long-term deficit, there are substantial effects on mood, mental and cognitive skills, and motor abilities. When it comes to recovery from hard physical efforts, there's simply no better treatment than sleep, and a lot of it."

The largest performance drop-offs can be seen among endurance athletes, and sports requiring quick reaction times and reflexes. To determine whether an athlete might gain a competitive edge simply by sleeping more, Stanford researcher Cheri D. Mah reached out to the Stanford Cardinal men's basketball team.

For two weeks, the players' athletic performance was assessed after getting their normal amount of sleep. They were fitted with motion-sensing wristbands to determine the actual length of their sleep, which averaged in at a mere 6.5 hours per night.

Next, the players were asked to extend their sleep time as much as possible for five to seven weeks. The players increased their average sleep time by about two hours, to 8.5 hours nightly. By the end of this test, players had improved their free throws by more than 11 percent, and their three-point shots by nearly 14 percent. Sprint drill speeds also improved for every single player on the team. As noted by The Atlantic:

“A 13-percent performance enhancement is the sort of gain that one associates with drugs or years of training — not simply making sure to get tons of sleep. Mah's research strongly suggests that most athletes would perform much better with more sleep...”

Sleep Coaching in the Big Leagues

A 2015 article in The Guardian²³ discusses the impact sleep coach Nick Littlehales, a former golf pro and marketer of bedding, has had on the Manchester United Football Club:

“Littlehales scored early points with the manager for his success working with United defender Gary Pallister, whose debilitating back injuries eased once Littlehales discovered the player was sleeping on a mattress that hampered his injury treatment ...

Sixteen years later he is a leading figure in the field, having assessed and reconfigured the bedrooms of a legion of international sporting stars as well as working with Chelsea, Real Madrid, England's national side and a host of Olympians ...

Littlehales makes sure sportspeople get the right hotel rooms on the right floor, the right air conditioning and temperature control, plus appropriate lighting and beds ... Other important factors are the potential for total blackout from the sun and temperature control ...

But the bedding is crucial. ‘If they don't tick the boxes I'm bringing my own or we'll try another hotel,’ he says ... He says everyone has different physical and mental recovery times but that for elite athletes, five 90-minute sleep cycles a day is optimal ... Training schedules are now often tailored around that need and many club training facilities now equipped with sleeping pods...”

Whether you're a professional athlete or not, sleep is an important yet all too often overlooked factor in health and well-being. If you're still skimping, thinking you've managed to get by OK so far, I urge you to reconsider and give sleep the attention it

deserves. You can do everything else right, but if you're not sleeping enough, or not sleeping well, many of the benefits of your healthy lifestyle will be lost.

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