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LIFT YOUR MOOD

3 HACKS THAT BOOST MOOD & WELL-BEING

REFORGED



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INTRODUCTION

A little over 10 years ago, I was in a bad spot in my life.

I was overweight, depressed, physically inactive, had low energy, and dealt with sleep insomnia.

From middle school until my junior year of high school, I was regularly bullied. This led me to isolate myself from people, which led to an even darker part of my life.

It led to me contemplating suicide regularly.

At that moment, I knew I needed help.

So I expressed my thoughts and feelings to my mother: how unhappy I was about how I looked and felt. How I was regularly picked on, and how I had nothing going for me.

My mother, being the tough lady she was, told me to "do something about it".

She wanted me to work out with her, which I did.

At first, I despised it.

Then I noticed something.

I ate better.

l slept better.

l felt better.

I looked better.

I thought better.

I realized that exercise was not only for physical appearance but also for mental health.

Exercise could be used as a mood booster and a stress reducer.

In fact, research supports this.

This book is designed to help jumpstart your journey to living a happier life with a more active lifestyle.

Where depression will no longer define you.

Where you can get your life back.

Living more actively changed my outlook and worldview on life.

It helped me climb out of my mental hell.

My goal is to help you climb out of yours.

Let's LIFT our moods.

THE BATTLE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

There is a "Silent Pandemic" of Mental Health issues continuing to grow at an alarming pace in society today.

More people today report mental health problems than ever before, with cases of depression in the country quadrupling as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic^[1].

None of this is our fault.

It's a societal problem as a whole.

A report from the Surgeon General noted that depression and mental health issues are a product of complexity that impacts us from a biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural perspective^[2].

While some of these things are outside of our control, there are a few things that we can control. For example, a sedentary lifestyle can have a large impact on depression.

According to The U.S. National Institutes of Health,^[3]researchers have found that sleep problems, a lack of energy, and physical inactivity may lead to a more depressed mood.

Further research indicates that healthy nutritional habits, physical activity, and sleep hygiene are classified as the "Winning Triad" for sustaining physical and mental health^[4].

And if you recall from my story: I had insomnia, I was overweight, and also physically inactive. In introducing more activity in my life, I ate better and slept better.

As a result, my entire quality of life improved, including my mental health.

How To Use This Book

This book complements everything we talk about in our brand.

You can read this entire book continuously, or you can read one section per week and focus strictly on the information from that one section.

Making small adjustments to your lifestyle bit by bit will allow you to build the habits necessary to improve your mood and well-being.

With that being said, let's start with the first focus of the book: The Mood-Lifting Pillars.

THE MOOD-LIFTING PILLARS

Exercise.

Nutrition.

Sleep.

If you improve your physical activity, your nutrition, and your sleep, your quality of life improves^[5].

Many behavioral studies show that proper exercise leads to proper nutrition, and better nutritional habits lead to more physical activity^[6].

Essentially, there's a TRI-directional relationship between exercise, sleep, and nutrition.

If you get these three in check, you can potentially improve your quality of life.

These are what we call the *three Mood-Lifting Pillars*.

To improve your mood and well-being, we are going to focus on building and reinforcing these pillars of health & wellbeing.

One At A Time

Some of us know the importance of exercise, nutrition, and sleep.

We just don't prioritize the importance of it because we have so many things going on in our lives.

What if I were to tell you that you don't need to change EVERYTHING you do in your life immediately?

That you can do just do a few things to start, and then add to them over time?

This is exactly how I started my journey.

And in this book, we are going to help you through exactly that.

Let's break down each side of the Mood-Lifting Pillar, and how you can slowly hack your way into a better lifestyle.

Pillar I: Exercise

Evidence has pointed to the fact that exercise can help with depression, anxiety, and stress.

It is something we all have access to, and it's done by moving our body, or to those who sweat: "sweating for that serotonin".

For myself, physical activity was the catalyst for my mental health journey.

It ignited the pursuit of improving my quality of life.

One of the things I noticed almost immediately was how much better I felt immediately after the three workout sessions I would have every week.

I even found it easier to fall asleep.

I no longer stayed up until midnight and woke up at 3 AM. My body was telling my mind it was too tired to be anxious.

Over time, frequent exercise and better sleep would lead me to eat more nutritiously.

Eventually, I started feeling amazing.

These three things started to stack up and they dramatically improved my quality of life.

And all I had to do was sweat for it.

Pillar II: Nutrition

Nutrition is not something that JUST helps with how you look.

It helps how you FEEL.

There are various nutrients that can help with brain health, cognitive performance, and more.

For example, some omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to help with depression and anxiety.

In addition, proper nutrition can help you with sustained energy levels, lower fatigue, and more.

When I started eating better as a result of exercise, my energy and focus improved as well.

I will share some hacks with you in this book.

Pillar III: Sleep

Before I started working out, my depression gave me horrible nights.

I would get in bed at 9 PM and have trouble sleeping until midnight. Then I would wake up at 3 AM and wouldn't be able to go back to sleep.

This happened for a long time, and contributed to my severe bouts of depression.

Here's what I learned as I got older: sleep extends life.

It helps immune cells in your brain to clear out waste.

This waste potentially blocks out the flow of information between our neurons.

This, among many other reasons is why sleep is SO IMPORTANT, and I am going to share with you things that have worked for me to get it in.

How You FEEL Is EVERYTHING

One of the most important foundational tips I can give you is to consider how you FEEL after everything we do.

Before your workout session, consider how you feel. Then consider how you feel after.

Consider how you feel after you slowly eat a more nutritious meal.

Consider how you feel upon waking up in the morning after creating a solid sleep ritual.

If you feel slightly BETTER, that's something worth chasing.

The most important thing I want you to gain from this book is the focus on FEELING better.

Don't worry so much about physical progress or weight loss in the mirror.

What's more important right now is to build these foundational pillars of well-being and then reinforce them.

In time, you'll notice that you will get stronger, feel healthier, and possibly even start to lose some pounds.

From there, we can add to our pillars and really build the mind and body we want to have.

Handling Rough Days

Lastly, I wanted to talk about one of the roadblocks you may face: your day-to-day life.

Something can happen one day where a cascade of problems comes your way.

It's so hard to think about your health and wellbeing these days, but these are the days that matter the most.

When you encounter hard days, do ONE thing that betters you.

In doing so, THAT is an accomplishment.

Stress Intensities

If you deal with depression, anxiety, and stress, you may have noticed the following: they can come in different levels and intensities.

These intensities will vary every day as well.

In understanding this, you can name your depression, anxiety, or stress levels and have a plan of action for each level.

Here's how I look at mine:

- Low-Intensity Day: The intensity is easily manageable. I can get stuff done and accomplish my goals with relative ease.
- Moderate-Intensity Day: This is when the stress is moderate, but it's nothing I can't handle. I'll get my exercise and nutrition in, and maybe reward myself with something like a show or movie to watch.
- **High-Intensity Day**: On these days, it's VERY HARD to stay motivated. When I experience this, I focus on TINY things that improve my mood. This can be going on a walk, making myself a nutritious and amazing-tasting smoothie, and trying to sleep earlier than typical. Doing just the SMALL things these days is an accomplishment.

LIFTING Your Mood

We've briefly set the foundation for what you should expect when starting your journey.

Now we will reinforce this triad and make them so effective that it'll make it easier to accomplish your goals.

1% Forward. Everyday.

On the days when the stress hits the hardest, do the minimum required tasks and monitor how you feel after doing them.

Regardless of what happens: if you mess up a day, don't be hard on yourself.

You've learned. You've gotten better. You've been consistent most of the days. That's SOMETHING.

Think about it like this: your goal is to get 1% better every day. 30 days of this makes you 30% better than when you started. 100 days of this makes you 100% better than when you started.

With that being said, let's get into this!



THE PILLAR OF EXERCISE

An active body equates to a more active mind.

The research around exercise and mental health continues to climb.

Depression and physical inactivity are a deadly duo in today's sedentary world. These two have a bi-directional relationship: if we are physically inactive, we are more prone to depression.

If we are depressed, we tend to be physically inactive.

This is known as the **Inactivity Trap**^[7]. Coined in an article by MK Elfrey, Elfrey states that the people who need exercise the most are those with depression.

And there is a plethora of research that supports this.

According to a recent study done in 2021, exercise not only reduced depressive symptoms but also improved the brain's ability to react and change^[8].

This means that exercise can promote neuroplasticity^[9] and can potentially improve our overall psychological well $being^{[10]}$.

Surveys have also reported that depressed people have noted that exercise is one of the most preferred and effective treatment options for them^[11].

If one thing is sure, if you're not exercising consistently, you definitely need to.

In this section, we are going to explore a few exercise motivation and consistency hacks to get you in there frequently.

With that being said, let's level up!

Start Small.

According to a recent study done in 2018^[12], resistance exercises helped reduce depressive symptoms significantly.

For starters, we recommended 10-15 minutes of physical activity per session, and then work up to longer lengths of time.

As you condition yourself to 45-60 minute workout sessions, you'll be ready for a more structured workout program for results.

From there, you can do what I do: when I am not motivated to workout, I commit to 10-15 minutes only.

Since I am committed to a small workout, I find it easier to get in there.

Next thing you know, I am spending more time in the gym completing the workout.

It's most important to build a habit and consistency around exercise.

Start by taking small steps in physical activity. Make exercise non-negotiable: your life depends on it.

Focus On The FEELING Post-Workout

One of the best personal recommendations I can give you is to monitor how you FEEL after a workout session.

As we have mentioned, physical activity is beneficial as a tool to battle depression and anxiety.

So it's super important to focus on how we FEEL afterward.

When I started focusing on how exercise made me feel, it allowed me to see my best progress in both my mind and body.

The weight loss came naturally as a result of me focusing on getting better and feeling better as a result of exercise.

This has worked for my other clients in the past and has actually helped them build more consistency in the gym. For some of them, whenever they feel stressed or down, they have an urge to exercise rather than stress eating.

They are guaranteed to have a mood boost that doesn't dissipate within a matter of seconds. 99.9% of the time they won't regret it either.

The Best Time To Exercise

Depending on work and life obligations, you should exercise when it is easiest for you. I recommend either in the morning before work or immediately after work.

These are the parts of our day where we have the most control, as we are typically not locked into a fixed schedule.

I have tried morning and evening workouts. While I like morning workouts a lot, I also enjoy working out in the evening (around 6 pm).

These are the parts of our day where we have the most control over: we all typically work from the hours of 8am-6pm, so exercising before or after may be ideal for you.

If you're like me and prefer to workout with less of a crowd, early morning workouts are perfect. When you get the hard part of your day done early, you may be feeling pretty good before you get to work.

Exercise LIFTS Your Mood

Exercise is a functional way to improve your health and wellbeing.

As a reminder, get ~3-4 hours of weekly moderate-intensity exercise.

It does not matter what kind of moderate-intensity exercise you do. No access to a gym? Go exercise in a park or go for an outdoor walk. You only need to get active and break a sweat, and you don't need equipment for that.

Movement is the most important thing to do for your body.

Again, our goal is to feel better and think better.

Exercise saved my life, and it can potentially do the same for you.

Get those endorphins flowing.

THE PILLAR OF NUTRITION

Nutrition can play a huge role in helping with depression and improving wellbeing. According to research, there is a strong correlation between poor diets and depression^[15].

While nutrition is individual for everyone, there are a few universal recommendations everyone can follow to improve our mood and well-being.

For example, studies have shown that individuals who eat foods rich in protein and other nutrients could potentially experience improvements in well-being^[16].

So in this section, we will cover four nutritional recommendations that can improve your mood and well-being.

Nutrition Hacks That LIFT Your Mood

Eat Your Protein

Protein is an essential macronutrient that helps retain or build muscle, helps with recovery, and helps with various other hormonal processes.

For example, protein is broken down into amino acids that help produce neurotransmitters like dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine. These neurotransmitters have been shown to have a connection with depression and anxiety.^[17]

For example, dopamine is a neurotransmitter that aids in improving mood and motivation. Having low amounts of dopamine in the body is common in some with depressive symptoms^[18].

It is essential to have a high protein diet not only for our mood and well-being, but for our satiety (fullness), prioritizing fat loss over muscle loss during a diet, and more.

Recommendations For Protein

We can count how much protein we eat based on the palm portion servings we have.

Here's a rule of thumb for this:

- Having 1-2 palm portion servings of lean protein per meal is a great starting point. Stay on the lower end if you have >4 meals per day.
- One palm hand portion serving of Protein = one serving.
- One scoop of protein powder = one protein serving.

This typically can add up to the recommend range of ~0.6-1g of protein per pound of bodyweight. Those will over 100lbs to lose can stay on the lower end.

If you follow these guidelines and spread them throughout 3-6 meals per day, you should start to get a good amount of protein in your diet.

Eat Your Fruits & Vegetables (Fiber)

When it comes to fruits and vegetables, most of us don't get enough in our diets.

For starters, recent research has shown that our body, brain, and gut are all connected.

Fruits & vegetables contain nutrients and fiber we need for our brain and body health^[19].

For example, magnesium and zinc are some nutrients that may potentially help with depression and anxiety^[20].

Recommendations For Fruits & Veggies

For the best benefits, we recommend consuming at least 3-5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. This will cover most of our nutrient deficiencies and help us get our fiber in.

For reference: One serving of fruits and vegetables = 1/2 cup or a fist portion serving.

Rule of thumb: shoot for 5 a day!

Omega-3s and EPA

Once you've got the protein and fiber down, the next thing I would focus on are getting more Omega-3 fatty acids in your diet.

Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish) have been shown to help with depression and anxiety.

This has been shown most notably in the Omega-3 fatty acid known as EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid).

When dealing with depression, studies have shown that you may potentially see some relief if you consume around 1000mg (or 1g) of EPA.^[21]

Another study found that you may potentially see some relief in anxiety if you consume around 2000mg (or 2g) of EPA. [22]

To explain further, Omega-3s are anti-inflammatory fatty acids that can aid in both brain and body health. Omega-6s, on the other hand, are pro-inflammatory fatty acids. In the average American diet, we tend to consume 16 times more Omega-6s than Omega-3s (16:1).

While you technically need both in your diet, it is recommended we have a 4:1 or lower ratio of Omega-6s to Omega-3s.

Our first recommendation is to work towards eating Seafood about 2-3 times per week. If you eat 3-4 oz (or palm size) of Salmon, you can get upwards to ~800mg EPA depending on the type of salmon.

If you can't do that because it is expensive, dislike fish, or other reasons, you can buy a fish oil supplement and take it daily to help with brain health.

If you look at the back of Fish Oil labels, you can find the servings of how much EPA is in each soft gel.

Depending on the quality of the fish oil, you may need upwards to 3-6+ softgels to get to that 1000mg EPA mark.

I take fish oil every day because I don't eat fish often.

Try These Simple Nutrition Guidelines

One of the direct diet recommendations we can give you is to follow some of the guidelines in a Mediterranean diet. A Mediterranean diet is a heart-helping and mood-boosting diet that is inspired by the foods people eat by the Mediterranean Sea.

Various studies have shown that the Mediterranean diet can help promote weight loss, prevent heart problems, and improve overall mood and well-being.^[23]

Here are some of the following guidelines:

- Eat these regularly: poultry, seafood, fruits, vegetables, potatoes, whole grains, olive oil, greek yogurt, egg whites
- Eat these in moderation: red meat, cheeses, eggs
- Eat these rarely: sugary drinks, processed foods, refined grains, refined oils

Follow these guidelines and you might see some pretty good results!

Stay Hydrated

We can't go without water, and some of us never drink enough. Hydration is not only important for bodily processes, but it is important for mood and wellbeing.

According to one study, dehydration has a connection to depression and anxiety risk^[24].

It is important to stay hydrated throughout the day so that our mood and well-being are not negatively impacted.

Work towards drinking up to 8 cups or 1 gallon of water daily. That is an optimal amount for hydration.

Get Some Vitamin D

In a more sedentary world today, we find ourselves more indoors.

It's important to get some outside time to connect with nature.

Sun exposure in the morning has also been shown to help us improve our sleep quality in the evening.^[25]

In addition, sun exposure can help our bodies produce Vitamin D.

Vitamin D is another essential nutrient needed for our overall health and serotonin regulation. This micronutrient is one that our skin synthesizes from sun exposure.

It regulates serotonin in both our brain and gut, improving brain health, bone health, overall wellbeing, and more.

According to research, low Vitamin D levels are connected to depression^[26]. Depression is especially common during the winter season when sun exposure is limited in most areas around the world (known as Seasonal Affective Disorder).

While you can get Vitamin D from food, or sunlight exposure, you can also supplement.

The following are recommendations for Vitamin D:

- When it comes to Vitamin D, a common recommendation is around 10-15 minutes of sun exposure. However, according to research, those with darker skin complexion may need more time in the sun to produce an adequate amount of Vitamin D^[27].
- Lunch Time is the best time for sun exposure. Based on research, noon is the best time to go outdoors to let your body efficiently make your Vitamin D^[28].
- If you don't get adequate sun exposure, consider supplementing with Vitamin D3. 1000-3000 IU of Vitamin D3 is an optimal amount for many of us^[29].

Those with depressive symptoms should consider spending time outside or supplementing when they do not.

Nutrition LIFTS Your Mood

If you're just getting started with nutrition, here's a recap of what we recommend:

- 1. **Eat more protein.** Consider adding a protein source to every meal. 1-2 palm hand portions per meal will be around 20-50g of protein (depending on your hand size). Having ~4 of these meals will help you hit your protein goal.
- 2. Eat Your Fruits & Vegetables. Most of us lack enough fruits and vegetables in our diets. Having AT LEAST 3-5 servings of fruits & veggies (combined) daily can improve our nutrient and fiber intake.
- 3. Make sure you get Omega-3s in your diet. Consider consuming fish at least 3x per week, or supplement with Fish Oil.
- 4. Stay Hydrated. Drink up to 8 cups to 1 gallon of water daily.
- 5. **Vitamin D.** Expose yourself to some sunlight daily as this produces Vitamin D. Alternatively, you can supplement with Vitamin D.

We've only covered four small parts of nutrition and mental health, but following these suggestions can be a great start in improving your mood & well-being!



THE PILLAR OF SLEEP

Just like the inactivity trap we mentioned in the exercise section, sleep is very similar.

There is a bi-directional relationship with sleep:

- Depressed individuals usually have sleep problems or insomnia.
- Sleep deprivation can also lead to depression or depression-like symptoms^[30].

Sleep deprivation can also lead to other problems, like cardiac health problems and even obesity^[31]. When sleep-deprived, people tend to consume more calorically dense, low-nutrient foods on average.

Quality sleep is essential to our entire health and well-being.

So how can we improve our sleep if we have insomnia or poor sleeping patterns?

We've got some strategies you can implement.

Sleep Hacks That LIFT Your Mood

Have A Consistent Sleep Schedule

The easiest thing you can start doing is building a habit of having a consistent sleep schedule.

According to research^[32], sleep quality is poorer when you have an inconsistent sleep schedule, *even if sleep duration is the same.*

We can improve sleep quality further by understanding our **Circadian Rhythm**. Our circadian rhythm is a "biological clock" that coordinates a wide range of processes in our body, most notably, our sleep-wake cycle.

When it comes to sleep, those with poor sleep cycles are likely to report anxiety and depression^[33].

After exercising, I found that I had the best quality of sleep when I would fall asleep around 9-11 pm and wake up around 5-7 am.

With that, here's what we recommend for sleep schedules:

- **Try to sleep at the same consistent time every day.** Find a time to sleep where you can get 6-8 hours of sleep and feel well-rested.
- If you can, go with the Circadian Rhythm. Try waking up around 5-8 am and going to sleep around 9-11 pm.
- Experiment until you find what works best for you. Try falling asleep an hour earlier and assess your quality of sleep.

Stop Looking At Your Phone Before Bed

It is important to limit technology in the evening.

Blue light exposure in the evenings can potentially increase our cortisol and reduce melatonin production in the evening.

Higher cortisol in the evening is correlated to mood disorders like depression.

As artificial lights increase our cortisol production and negatively impact our circadian rhythm at night^[34], stop looking at your phone once you hit the bedroom.

Limit your technological use in your bedroom. It may help you go to sleep quicker and help you not spend hours looking at memes.

Reminder To Get Some Sun

As a reminder, sunlight helps synthesize Vitamin D, an essential micronutrient that aids in many processes like wellbeing and bone health.

Sunlight exposure also can help your body produce more melatonin in the evening^[35].

Melatonin is a hormone that our brain secretes at night.

It essentially primes our body for sleep (more on melatonin later).

While serotonin and melatonin are two different hormones, there's a correlation between a low Vitamin D intake and sleep quality^[36].

Those deficient in Vitamin D typically suffer from poor quality of sleep.

Something as simple as light exposure at certain times of the day has been shown to treat insomnia cases $\frac{37}{37}$.

A reminder that you should get daily sunlight exposure, and supplement with Vitamin D if you don't.

Are You Exercising?

The best recommendation I can give you for sleep quality is exercise.

Physical activity was my secret weapon to battling insomnia, and I HIGHLY ENCOURAGE you once again to get more active.

Exercise has not only been shown to improve depression; it has also been shown to improve sleep quality as well.

According to one study, moderate-intensity exercise has been shown to improve sleep in patients with chronic insomnia^[38].

As sleep deprivation can impact our mental health, we recommend getting some daily physical activity to improve overall sleep quality.

Consider following the recommendations we gave you in the exercise section, as they can potentially also help you improve sleep quality.

Limit Caffeine 6-10 Hours Before Bed.

Caffeine promotes wakefulness, and the effects can last for hours at a time. In studies, caffeine has been shown to impact our sleep for up to six hours^[39].

Do NOT be that person who drinks Starbucks at night and then wonders why you have trouble sleeping.

Limit your caffeine intake 6-10 hours before bed.

Supplement With Melatonin

Once you have implemented a few of these strategies, you can then try a melatonin supplement.

Melatonin supplements have been shown to improve sleep quality and help with insomnia^[40], making them a great supplement for us to use.

Supplementing with as little as 500 mcg-1 mg has been shown to improve sleep.

Sleep LIFTS Your Mood

Sleep plays a large part in not only our physical health but mental as well.

It is essential to optimize your sleep by having a consistent sleep schedule, limiting your caffeine intake hours before bed, limiting the distractions in your bedroom, and supplementing with melatonin.

Most importantly, consider exercising to build up sleep pressure. Recent research notes that high-intensity brain activities like exercise can drive the need for sleep^[41].

Lastly, we recommend looking at the resources section of this book for more information on sleep strategies.^[42]

Get that proper sleep hygiene in and let's conquer that sleep!

LIFT YOUR MOOD, LIFT YOUR MIND.

I know it may seem difficult at this time to imagine that your life can change within 30, 60, or 90 days... or even for the better.

According to neuroscience, it can.

Exercise, for one, has the potential to promote neuroplasticity in our brains^[43].

Neuroplasticity is the ability of your brain to simply be "rewired".

To rewire our brains, we should pursue the consistent practice of new behaviors.

And in going through this book, we believe the next steps are to continue working on the well-being triad so that these habits become second nature.

Imagine exercising, eating better, and sleeping better consistently for 90 straight days.

It doesn't need to be perfect, you just need to do micro-adjustments.

You will notice the immediate benefits of these things if you are aware of them: you will eat better. Sleep better. Feel better.

Now think about these micro-adjustments over a period of months... and even years.

You have the potential to THINK better.

With these thoughts, you will pursue greater opportunities.

You will be bolder, and more confident.

It might seem difficult to imagine right now, but I have seen it and experienced it.

I've experienced a complete change in my thought process through the pursuit of exercise and continuous improvement.

Where you are now can completely improve a thousandfold if you continue onwards.

If this book improves your life for the better, please let us know in our Discord Group!

I would love to hear how your journey is going.

Lastly, I want to tell you not to battle your demons alone.

Over a decade ago, I started my fitness journey with the love and support of one person. Technology and people weren't as connected as we are today.

Today, we can extend more opportunities to connect you with many others on the same journey.

While we are still growing these communities, we promise to continue helping you lift your mood.

We created Reforged to help you on your journey.

And we hope to see you go through growth & transformation.

Let's go out there and seize our greatest lives.

- Tony

RESOURCES

Our Bonuses

If you are looking to expand your mind some more, <u>check out all of our resources here.</u>

We have videos and other content waiting for you!

Reforged

Need an extra boost for the gym?

Our products were crafted to help you live a more active lifestyle.

Check out our Pre-Workout on Amazon.

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[42] We cover more information on sleep quality on our blog. Check it out in the resources section!

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