
Module 12 – Pillar Six: Rejuvenating Sleep

Melatonin Magic



Any light that hits your eyes will reduce the production of melatonin and interfere with sleep.

If you're not sleeping as well as you'd like then you need to understand the basics about melatonin and how to make it work for you.

Melatonin is a hormone produced primarily by the pineal gland in the center of your brain when your eyes are not receiving any light. In other words, light inhibits the flow of melatonin.

Before electricity, man largely lived by the sun — rising with it and going to bed with it. Of course, this was partly because man needed the light of the sun to do productive activities. The body obviously adapted to the fact that sleep is about the only useful thing we could do in the dark at night...right, besides the other thing!

Melatonin production has also been linked to deep states of contemplation and meditation — very beneficial nocturnal activities. The pineal gland is considered the highest center of awareness in the body by Buddhists and Hindus. It's shaped like a pinecone which has been a significant symbol used in all the world's religions.

Needless to say, all the evidence I've reviewed plus my own personal experience, shows that you need melatonin to get to sleep and to stay asleep. And your brain needs darkness in order to secrete melatonin.

Live in Light

While darkness triggers the production of melatonin, light produces serotonin which makes you feel awake and alert. You need both. Too little of one usually produces too little of the other. So if your serotonin levels are down during the day, your body will produce less melatonin at night. Serotonin is the "feel-good" neurotransmitter. Prozac increases levels of serotonin in the body. But you can do that naturally!

Making sure you are exposed to sunlight during the day, especially at noon, will help ensure you get enough serotonin. Even if it's sunlight through a window. Ideally, you should get outside at noon time. Go for a walk after lunch to help your digestion (or eat lunch outside). It may take an extra ten minutes from your day, but you'll probably make it up by sleeping less (because you sleep deeper).

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To repeat; exposing yourself to bright light during the day and complete darkness at night balances your serotonin and your melatonin.

NOTE: Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) is a depressive condition that occurs in some people as the result of not enough natural daylight.

Sleep in the Dark

The best way to get your brain producing melatonin is to make sure your bedroom is completely dark when you sleep. You shouldn't even be able to see your hand in front of your face. This is how our ancestors lived. They didn't have access to electricity like we do. Night time was dark time. Even in the cities. The soft glow of stars or the moon was about as much light as they saw.

As we talked about in Module 4 *Sleeping Without Electricity*, you want to get rid of any electronic devices in your bedroom — especially those with flashing lights.

If you have outdoor lights around your home, make sure to shut them off too. They're just wasting power. That's the first thing I did when we moved into our new house in Maui.

Of course, there are your neighbours' lights and street lamps that you still have to contend with. I have a running "war" with the maintenance people because I'm always turning the ground lights away from my bedroom window.

You can buy "black out" blinds which will not even allow bright lights to shine through. Also, put thick curtains extending far beyond the width of the window to block out any light that may peak around the edges of the blind. But, I warn you, they can be quite expensive.

The only other problem with this strategy is that it blocks air circulation. Actually that can be a major problem. Especially in the summer you may need the window wide open to stay cool. You may be able to simply open up all the other windows in your home and keep the door to your bedroom open.

Or you could just buy a slingshot and knock out all the street lamps.

Or you can get a blindfold...

Blindfolds

A blindfold is what I use and is probably the second best answer. Since melatonin is not only produced in the pineal gland but also the skin, exposing the skin to light may reduce its production somewhat. But that's not going to happen if you're all snuggled up in your blankets. Even in the summer, most people sleep with a light sheet over them.

One drawback to a blindfold is that it may dry your eyes — but I find my ceiling fan does a great job of drying my eyes already! You can easily remedy this by using some homeopathic eye drops before going to bed and in the morning. I use a product called Similasan for Dry Eyes.

If you have cats, make sure you don't leave your blindfold lying around or they'll go crazy with the elastic string. And they'll flake off cat dander that is not a good substance to have near your eyes.

Ideally you want a blindfold that fits properly around the bridge of your nose so that light doesn't peak through.

Avoid Radiant Light 30 Minutes Before Bed

Make sure you don't have tons of lights shining in your eyes as you get ready for bed. Use a little nightlight as you brush your teeth. Keep everything dim. Ideally you'd want to spend 15 to 30 minutes with dimmed lights practicing meditation or prayer or listening to calming music.

Most importantly, though, is not to use a computer or watch television 30 minutes before bed. With such devices you are looking directly at a radiant light source. It totally inhibits the flow of melatonin. Have you ever noticed how easily you can stay awake watching a movie or surfing the internet. That's serotonin being stimulated and suppression of melatonin.

So, turn off the computer or the TV at least 30 minutes before bedtime. Thirty minutes is probably the amount of time you spend puttering around getting ready for bed anyway. I dim my computer screen in the evening hours and it immediately relaxes my eyes. There's usually a button on your monitor that will adjust brightness. You can also work on battery instead of being plugged in; that usually dims the screen. On my MacBook the F1 button on the top left is the dimmer.

Urinating In The Dark

If you wake up in the middle of the night and need to use the washroom, don't turn on any lights. You should know your way around. If you do need light, have a little flashlight you can use — and do not look directly into the beam.

Supplementation

Melatonin is available as a supplement in the US, unlike other countries where it is prohibited over-the-counter. The supplement is inexpensive and basically a synthetic version of the hormone. In small quantities it has proven to be quite safe. But it is not ideal compared to naturally making your own melatonin. You only want to use it if you have to and as little as you need to get to sleep.

Sometimes people find using melatonin for a month gets their brain back in shape producing its own melatonin. Other people just become dependent on it. Adjust it to your needs. And if you find you need it every night, don't worry because it is extremely safe in low doses. More on dosage later.

Melatonin is a good sleep aid when you are experiencing a temporary situation that's interfering with your usual routine. For example, when you've been forced to stay up late and are now "wired." Or if you need to sleep during the day. It's also good for overcoming jetlag.

On the whole, only use it if you have to. Not because it's dangerous but just because it should be unnecessary. Why be dependent on supplements if you don't have to be?

How Much Melatonin Supplement Is Safe?

The upper limit of melatonin dosage for sleep is generally recognized as 3mg. Larger doses may result in nausea, hormone imbalances, feeling irritable or not feeling fully awake the next day. You may also find your dreams are too vivid or you experience nightmares. These are all indications that you're overdosing.

I recommend you start at 0.5mg. You may have to cut a 1.0mg pill in half. Then increase in 0.5mg increments each night until you find it is working for you.

How Will This Help Me?

What scientists have discovered about melatonin has helped us understand some of the benefits derived from sleep. Melatonin is a proven antioxidant and helps fight off cancer cells. It has also been shown to boost your immune system and strengthen your endocrine system. So sleeping in the dark is a great way to prevent all sorts of diseases.

Make It Happen...

1. Turn off the TV, the computer and anything else with a monitor 30 minutes before bed (and dim the lights in the house or use night lights).
2. Sleep either with a blindfold or blackout curtains. One way or the other, make sure you can't see your hand in front of your face when you go to sleep.
3. If you can't go to sleep easily, experiment with 0.5mg of melatonin increasing each night in increments of 0.5mg until you fall asleep or reach 3.0mg.

Questions and Answers

Why are OTC melatonin supplements regulated in so many countries?

Melatonin was regulated in Canada for several years but was recently brought back on the market. I believe it's still regulated in Germany and in other European countries. Some countries require a prescription and treat it as a drug (which it is not). They cite that it causes grogginess and nightmares and the like. The truth of the matter is more likely that it's competition for Big Pharma's prescription sleeping pills that really "knock you out" rather than "put you to sleep."

I find supplementing with melatonin gets me to sleep but I still don't sleep all that well. Can you explain?

The supplement is not a replacement for darkening your room or wearing a blindfold. The supplement has a short half-life. It works for the first few hours but then your own brain needs to kick in producing your own melatonin. It can't do that unless your eyes are not exposed to light. Think vampires.

So, take a very small dose of melatonin (e.g. 0.5 mg) at bedtime. Enough to get you in sleep mode. Make sure you either have a blindfold on or your room is pitch black.

I sleep in total darkness, but keep on waking up and having to take more melatonin. What could be wrong?

If you have no other symptoms that would wake you such as indigestion, pain or restlessness, then the pineal gland in your brain may be under some stress.

One cause of this is calcification of the pineal gland. This is most commonly caused by too much calcium in your drinking water or taking calcium carbonate supplements. As people get older they tend to produce less melatonin probably because they develop calcification in the pineal. Having heart disease, arthritis, bone spurs, and joint pains are signs of calcification.

Stop taking calcium carbonate supplements immediately. Your body can't absorb them and they only cause problems. Also make sure you are getting enough sunlight or vitamin D supplementation so that you can absorb the calcium in your food properly so you don't need supplements.

How does melatonin work with blind people?

Many blind people suffer sleep disorders, especially blind children, or people who recently went blind. Taking a small amount of melatonin at bedtime may help bring them back into regulation.

If they can see any light at all, they should try to expose themselves to as much as they can during the day. Otherwise, eventually, I expect their body will adapt and begin to produce melatonin in response to other signs that night time has arrived. Interestingly, blind moles who live under the ground still live according to a 24-hour cycle.

Is melatonin supplementation safe for children?

In general, I would not recommend giving melatonin to children. If you did, limit it to 0.25mg to 0.5mg. Far better to just get all the electronic equipment out of their bedroom, ditch the nightlight, give them a blindfold or darken the room, and turn off the TV, the computer and the video games a half hour before bed. Nightlights are especially unhealthy for young children as they will never be able to go into a deep sleep. A lot of the mood disorders and ADHD problems amongst children might be solved by having them sleep in total darkness.

Module Twelve “Claimer”

Instead of a disclaimer, I’d like to talk about what you can lay “claim” to with your Future Health Now! membership. A “claim” means that you have a “right” to something. I’m telling you that you have the right to “Take Back Your Power” as a human creator. You’ve always had this power. You may have just forgotten about it.

If you are not ready for “More” then I don’t want my words to make you feel that you are being judged or made to feel that you are “less than.” For example, if you don’t want to look at your poop, that’s OK, you don’t have to. I’d rather you just delete one of the modules that “doesn’t speak to you” rather than make you think I’m pushing you too hard. Or maybe just set aside that module and come back to it later.

If you already have good health, then Future Health Now! will keep you there. But if you signed up because you are unwell, don’t feel discouraged if you can’t do all the strategies that I recommend. Every week I remind you that if you can do 20%, you’re still getting 80% of the benefit. I also make sure that I give you choices of what you can do and a long timeframe to do it in.

So, pat yourself on the back for your past, present and future achievements and put a smile on your face. Thank your physical body for all it does for you and appreciate every organ, every cell, every fluid that your body makes. Sometimes we just have to get out of the way of our body and let it do what it does naturally. This place of feeling better and better about your body instead of worrying about aches and pains is actually one of the keys to better health. The better it gets, the better it gets as you come into your power as a human creator!

Until Next Week

Don’t think you have to do EVERYTHING that I outline in the Future Health Now! modules. I really don’t expect you to! Even if you just do 20% you’ll probably see 80% of the results you are looking for.

All you have to do this week is get a handkerchief and make a blindfold to keep the light out of your eyes. It’s that simple. You can also try melatonin supplementation to see if that will work for you. Or just save it for jetlag and traveling.

Coming Up In Module 13

In our Vitalizing Food pillar let's delve into the *Dairy Dichotomy*. My opening message in that module is "Ignore the health debate and listen to your body." Dairy gets such bad publicity, but it all depends on quality, where the animal came from, whether it's goat, cow, sheep or buffalo and how it's prepared. While I'm not saying these methods make dairy appropriate for everyone, if you are eating dairy, I'll talk about the best dairy to eat and how to prepare it so you can actually digest it!

If you have any questions about this module email me at help@drcarolyndean.com



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