

THE PROBLEM: RESTLESS SLEEP

Try: Meditation



“Sleep – nature’s best medicine – is becoming increasingly elusive for our ‘always-on’, smart phone dependant generation,” says Larah Davis, a yoga and wellness expert and founder of Ibiza Retreats (ibizaretreats.com). “Our over-stimulated lifestyles are continually triggering the stress response – activating the sympathetic arm of the autonomic nervous system and increasing the heart rate, preparing us to ‘fight, flight or freeze’. This in turn triggers our adrenals, releasing a combination of hormones including cortisol and adrenaline, which keeps the mind switched on too. This response over-rides tiredness and this is why sleep issues, from moderate difficulty drifting off to acute insomnia, are becoming a modern day epidemic.

“To interrupt this catch-22 situation, meditation (and especially mindfulness meditation) is being hailed amongst scientific studies as the go-to solution for relaxing the body and mind into a healthy restful sleeping state. In the 1970s Dr Herbert Benson coined the phrase the ‘relaxation response’ to describe the deep physiological shift that happens when we stop being stressed and relax into our natural state of wellbeing. This occurs when we shift down into the parasympathetic rest and digest mode of being. Meditation, he observed, through focusing the mind (rather than letting it wander) interrupted the loops of stimulation to the sympathetic nervous system. And, as ongoing studies at Harvard and beyond have shown, meditation increases blood flow and expands grey matter (a key component of the central nervous system) enhancing the body’s self-healing potential while sleeping.”

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Just a few minutes of meditation each day can make a huge difference to your sleep quality. Begin with a target of 10 minutes per day and observe how you fall into slumber far more easily. Try following a guided meditation with the Headspace app (headspace.com).

THE PROBLEM: STRESS

Try: Massage

“Massage or bodywork is now becoming a part of our regular body maintenance rather than a luxury,” says therapist and bodyworker Katie Light (thelighttechnique.com). “People are much more aware of their wellbeing and how bodywork is such a key part for rebalancing our physical and mental state.

“Stress affects us in many ways and can show up on the surface with physical ailments, such as knots of tension, injuries, aches and pains, fatigue or migraines. Stress commonly manifests itself where we have weakness in the body and high stress levels can equal poor physical and mental health. However, we need to not just treat the physical but the whole being by asking: ‘What goes on in their daily lives? What is their lifestyle like and what is the root of the problem?’ Our day to day stresses affect the mind as well as the physical and our cells can hold onto memory, good or bad, which we need to understand and nurture.

“Massage doesn’t just remove tension and increase blood and lymph flow, it allows all of the organs to relax, improving digestion, helping to de-clutter the mind, restoring our mental state and rebalancing our nervous system. This allows a better night’s sleep too, giving us more energy, mentally and physically. Most importantly massage will nurture you, allowing the mind, body and soul to talk to each other, creating harmony and balance, which we all need a little bit of.”

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Give yourself a hand massage to release tension and improve circulation:

- Stretch your hand out and one by one, gently pull and twist each finger then squeeze the webbed parts between each finger.
- Next, turn your palm upwards and rub in a circular motion before moving across to the fleshy part beneath the thumb. Repeat on both hands.



THE PROBLEM: DEPRESSION

Try: Acupuncture

“The Chinese view of depression is very different to that of conventional western medicine,” says Amanda Hair, lecturer of acupuncture at College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM) (naturopathy-uk.com). “The TCM theory (Traditional Chinese Medicine) sees the symptoms of depression manifesting not only as emotional expression, such as sadness and lethargy, but also as physical body discomfort with symptoms such as autoimmune disease, chronic pain and digestive issues.

“In TCM two organs have a physical and energetic responsibility for our ‘joy’. They are the heart and the liver. Both have extremely different functions than accorded to them by western science. The liver is responsible for the movement of our energy – our ‘qi’ (pronounced chee) and if this energy doesn’t move efficiently, it can cause signs of lethargy and stagnation, which makes it difficult for us to connect with our joy. One of the functions of the heart is to ‘house the mind and the spirit’ and to feel happiness, there needs to be movement from the liver energy to enable us to connect and feel uplifted.”

The power of acupuncture to restore the health of the body and mind can be life-changing. “Acupuncturists ask many questions to enable a diagnosis,” Amanda adds. “Based on the answers they choose acupuncture points to move the qi. Naturopathic acupuncturists will also recommend nutritional and herbal tinctures to complement the acupuncture points, further helping to reduce the physical and emotional signs of depression.”

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

For a quick stress fix, try some acupressure. Start at your wrist and measure three fingers down, onto your arm. Where your third finger sits is an acupressure point. Apply pressure here with your thumb and gently rub in a circular motion for two minutes or until you feel less anxious.