

# Pillow Talk

by Emily Manin, class of 2019  
Peer Health Educator



We all know that feeling of anxiety as we lay in bed, trying to fall asleep, but all we can think about is everything we have to get done tomorrow. We toss and turn, trying to put the to-do list in the backs of our minds. Laundry, calc webwork, anthro essay.... The list goes on and on and keeps us awake for hours, by which time we are now anxious that we will be too tired to function the following day, giving us another thing to stress about. How does one tackle this vicious cycle?

Honestly, there is not one fool-proof method that works for everyone. You may have to try out many different strategies. Here are a few that work for me:

1. Don't think about all the challenges that the following day holds. Instead, reflect on the highlights of the previous day. Try to capture the feelings you noticed during the good parts of your day. Not only will this relax you and force you to avoid stressing about the future, but it will also give you a more positive outlook.
2. You have probably heard this hundreds of times... but don't look at your phone or laptop right before you go to bed. Social media and the internet tend to be huge stressors. It may seem relaxing to passively scroll through your Instagram feed, but in reality, these outlets are often sources of decreased self-esteem and increased anxiety regarding social life.
3. Go to **Stress-Less@WashU!** Stress-Less is a 20-minute free



consultation with an awesome Master of Social Work student, Ruby Solomon, from the Brown School. It helps target the main stressors in your life and will provide you with strategies to best manage these stressors. Ruby works for Health Promotion Services and has office hours in the Zenker Wellness Suite in the Summers Rec Center.

4. **Meditation Mondays:** One of the Mental Health Peer Health Educators, Taylor Pitcher, leads a guided meditation session every Monday at 3 p.m., and a representative from the Interfaith Campus Ministries Association leads one every Monday at 4 p.m. Both are open to all students, staff, and faculty and take place in the Zenker Wellness Suite in the Summers Rec Center.
5. Close the door to your room and play white noise/beach sounds on your phone as you fall asleep. Coming from someone who lives in a sophomore dorm in a suite of 6 of my (very loud) best friends, it can be difficult to get 7-8 hours of quality sleep. I suggest that when you decide you really are ready to go to bed, commit to it and let everyone else in your room/suite know that you are sleeping by closing the door. Loud conversations and laughing are unavoidable in a college dorm, but distracting your ears with sounds from the ocean or even white noise can be very effective.



The bottom line is that getting a good night's sleep is nearly impossible in college unless you make a concerted effort to adjust aspects of your routine to promote a good night's sleep. Take advantage of Stress-Less and Meditation Mondays, occupy your mind with the positives rather than the stressors in your life, and most of all - experiment with resources and sleeping techniques. Different strategies work for different people, but everyone needs sleep!

## A Light Sleeper's guide to Prioritizing Sleep



by Ruby Tuesday Solomon  
Master of Social Work candidate 2017  
Brown School, Washington University

As a graduate student who is a light sleeper, I have always been jealous of those who fall easily into slumber. I'm the person who cannot travel without earplugs, requires 5 pillows (arranged just right, mind you), wakes up in the middle of the night to create an impromptu to-do list, and has been described as "flopping around like a fish out of water all night" by those who have had the misfortune of sharing a bed with me. If you're like me, you might find it frustrating when you wake up tired and cranky and you're told by a well-meaning friend, parent, roommate, partner, teacher, or health professional, "you should just get more sleep." If you're like me, you might feel like roaring a resounding "OBVIOUSLY," before gathering your ear plugs, pillows, and to-do list and stomping away. Most of us who struggle with getting to sleep—whether because we are light sleepers, just can't seem to pull ourselves away from work, friends, children, partners, the state of the world, or Youtube, or are suffering from a sleep disorder—know that we should be getting more sleep! The real question is: How? How do we go about finding a sleep ritual that works for us amidst a culture of busyness and a world of distraction? Here is a list of tips from the Chronicles of a Light Sleeper, yours truly.

1. **Start to notice when you are in your own "fog zone."** The "fog zone" is what I call that unique space of overtired where functioning effectively is a hazy uphill (sometimes ridiculous in an almost funny way) struggle. When I haven't slept enough for a few days, I start to feel like my thoughts are slowly marching through a bewildering fog. This sensation of foggy makes it difficult to remember (anything mostly) and my reactions are noticeably slower. I feel hungry more often and find my eyes watering with exhaustion. Being in a warm room is enough to ensure a crick in my neck from the number of times I'm nodding off. This isn't sustainable for me, though when I'm stressed or

busy enough, I can fool myself into thinking it is. Sleep deprivation can have serious consequences physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Your health, relationships, work, academic life, and faith can be shaken if you are sleep deprived. How do you know when you're in your own version of the "fog zone?" What are your symptoms?

2. **Be realistic about your ideal bed time.** If you have night classes, children, or are naturally a night owl, consider going to bed later and getting up later. Setting a bedtime that's impossible to adhere to leaves most of us feeling like we have failed at our goal, and this often discourages us from trying again or trying at all. When you think about your week, what is the earliest you could realistically go to sleep based on your schedule and what you know about how long it takes you to wind down? Even if you have to get up early after going to bed late, being realistic about your bedtime will reduce stress about falling asleep, and often leads to a deeper, more nourishing night's rest.
3. **Know how much time does it take you to wind down.** After you get out of work or class, what do you need to do to relax? Watch a Netflix episode? Eat a snack? Shower? Read? Stretch? Prepare your outfit for the next day? Add up the amount of time it takes you to do each of these things and subtract this from your goal bed time. Do you typically give yourself enough time to wind down? You might need to adjust your ideal and realistic bed time based on how long it takes you to wind down. For example, winding down for me includes changing into pajamas, unpacking my bags from the day and tidying up my living space, brushing my teeth and washing my face, and then getting into bed and reading until I feel sleepy. I usually give myself an hour to meander through this routine. If I want to go to bed at 11pm, I begin my sleep ritual at 10pm.
4. **Create a sleep ritual.** We all have a sleep ritual already, whether we are aware of it or not. I say "create" a sleep ritual because this means being intentional about setting the tone for a good night's rest. I used to have a sleep ritual which involved getting home, throwing my bags on the floor, changing into comfortable clothing (throwing my other clothes on the floor), surfing the web or checking emails, noticing the time in a panicked fashion, and then forcing myself to disconnect and try to sleep. This sleep ritual wasn't restful and I didn't feel like I was really choosing it at all--it was just what I did automatically. Creating a sleep ritual means choosing to craft an environment and routine for yourself that you think will help you rest. Instead of changing into just any comfortable clothing, I find it helps me to specifically change into pajamas. For me, it signifies that I am transitioning into slumber land. I like to feel as though my space is tidy because I feel like I've tied up my loose ends for the day. I avoid screens (for the most part) during my sleep ritual because I find I get sleepier from reading a book or a magazine. Have you chosen your sleep ritual? If not, what do you think would help you spread a sleep vibe to your environment, routine and psyche?

5. **Use the earth's natural rhythm to your advantage.** For many of us, the alarm clock bleeping angrily in the morning is a truly soul crushing sound. The fact that it's probably still dark outside compounds the horror that it is somehow, unbelievably, time to wake up already. As hard as it might be, the best thing you can do is immediately turn on a light or open a blind (if day has dawned). Using light and dark to signify awake and asleep is the strongest way to synch and restore your sleep cycle. After you recover from the bright light stabbing at your weary eyes, you will start to transition more quickly from sleep to wakefulness. Keep at this for a while until your body is accustomed to associating light with wakefulness and you might find waking up to be a more joyful affair.
6. **If in doubt, reach out to a health professional.** If difficulty sleeping or poor sleep quality has been your experience for a long time (and you aren't chugging coffee right before bed) there might be medical/biological or psychological/emotional reasons that sleeping soundly still eludes you. The side-effects of certain medications, endocrine disorders, respiratory ailments, or pain from any source can prevent the body from resting well. Additionally, stress, worry, rumination, or psychosis can also prevent the body from resting well. Sleep is a fundamental way that humans restore and nourish themselves holistically. Please, please, please, visit a health care professional if your sleep remains troubled or if you consistently wake up feeling unrefreshed. You can make an appointment at [shs.wustl.edu](http://shs.wustl.edu). If you are not sure whether you need to see a mental health or medical services provider, you may call 314-935-6677 and speak with a nurse who can help guide you. You deserve a day free from dogged exhaustion and a night full of peaceful slumber.
7. **Don't underestimate the power of sleep.** Getting enough sleep means getting an amount of sleep that doesn't leave you feeling sleepy the next day. For most people, this means 7-9 hours of sleep a night. As graduate students, partners, parents, professionals, humans, it is plausible that there could be weeks, or even months, where despite our efforts to sleep enough, life gets in the way and we find ourselves feeling drained and tired. Many of us, however, forget that a primary antidote to feeling overwhelmed, stressed, lost, strained, or--wait for it--tired, is SLEEP. Sometimes the best way to take care of ourselves, to heal ourselves, to return to ourselves is by arranging your 5 pillows, throwing on your pajamas, putting in your ear plugs, turning down the lights, and SLEEPING.

These are just a few tips, taken from the field of sleep science and my own journey to prioritize sleep in my life. There is a lot more information out there about ways to improve your sleep routines and alleviate difficulty in sleeping. If this piqued your interest and you want to learn more go to <http://shs.wustl.edu/HealthAndWellness/HealthTopics/Pages/Sleep.aspx>, [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org), or [www.powersleep.org](http://www.powersleep.org). I wish you many nights of sweet dreams.

# Three Steps Toward a Happier You

by Judy Yoo, Class of 2018 Peer Health Educator

Take a moment to ask yourself honestly: Am I happy with my life right now? Even if you answered yes, here are some tips from Dr. Tim Bono, professor of Positive Psychology here at WashU, that you can integrate into your daily routine to give your happiness a boost.

1. **Prioritize Sleep:** I know what you're thinking: "Really. I open up this article, and really, the first thing they tell me is to get more sleep. You think I don't know that? I really would get more sleep if I could you know." Trust me, I hear you, but the key word here is "Prioritize". It is one thing to tell yourself that you should try to get more sleep, and another thing entirely to say that you need to make sleeping a priority. Making sleeping a priority means that you realize how important it is, and that you might need to sacrifice a few things to make sure that you get enough sleep. A good way to go about this might be to establish a deadline for yourself each night about an hour before you plan on sleeping. This serves as motivation to work productively, and will make it much easier to build sleeping enough into your daily habits.
2. **Exercise:** Again, I know you're looking at this rolling your eyes, but hear me out. We all know that exercising releases those wonderful endorphins that make us happier people, the question is: how do we make exercising a daily activity? First of all, by exercise, I don't mean that you have to be in the gym for an hour every day sweating at the treadmill and hating your life. It's all about making exercise something exciting and fun that you look forward to doing. For the first few weeks, it's hard, but once you build it into your daily habit, it becomes like second nature. For me personally, I know that I'm a busy

person and time is always my primary concern – so I use high intensity interval training circuits to get my workouts done in 15-20 minutes every day and even that short amount of time makes me feel so much happier.



3. **Practice Gratitude:** What does practicing gratitude even mean? Well, let's try a quick experiment. I want you to rate yourself a number on a scale of 1-10 how happy you are right this second (1= I am Eeyore and I live in a cloud of gloom, 10 = I'm living and breathing sunshine and rainbows). Now, stop reading for a moment, and take the next few moments to think about 10 things that you're thankful for. If you're in a space that permits this, go ahead and say those 10 things aloud – if possible, say them clearly and loudly. Having done this, rate yourself honestly again on the same happiness scale and compare those two scores. Likely, you're feeling at least a little bit happier after the exercise. \*If at this point you read ahead without doing the experiment. Stop. Do the experiment, it's 5 seconds of your day, and it'll make you a bit happier\* One way I like to build this as a habit in my daily routine is to take 10 seconds right before I fall asleep, and tell myself, aloud, a few things that I'm thankful for. This puts me in a happier headspace before I fall asleep each night, and strengthens the neural pathways related to thinking positively.

## Sweet Dreams: The Impact of Sleep on Well-Being

Thursday, March 23, 5:00 p.m.

Presentation by Timothy J. Bono, PhD, assistant dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and lecturer in psychology,  
(Location in Sumers Recreation Center to be announced. Visit the **health promotion calendar** for updates.)

This presentation outlines the important work the brain does when we sleep and the implications it has for both our emotional well-being and mental acuity. We'll look at the natural rhythms of sleep and what we can do to fall asleep more easily and remain asleep long enough to wake feeling well-rested.

And for those days when we haven't had quite a full night's rest, we'll take a look at how a well-timed power nap can refresh us without throwing off the next night's sleep schedule. We'll also discuss sleep's impact on nutrition and activity.



# A NON-SCIENTIFIC GUIDE FOR SLEEP-DEPRIVED COLLEGE STUDENTS

by Stefan Yu, Class of 2017  
Peer Health Educator

“Do as I say, and not as I do.” This is a phrase that encompasses so many aspects of being a responsible, mature, full-grown human being. Yet when it comes to sleeping, the last thing we do is what we tell ourselves we should do.

Everybody has made plans to ‘go to sleep early tonight,’ and then found themselves listlessly watching TV shows or filling their heads with useless information from BuzzFeed at 2 a.m.

College students know that the bedroom should be dark; that the sleep environment should be comfortable and quiet; and that a regular sleep and wake-up time is preferred.

College students know that to avoid rigorous exercise, blue-light electronic screens, food, and caffeine before bed to ensure quality sleep.

College students know that developing a bed time ritual and that doing mindfulness exercises helps achieve a state of relaxation, which also facilitates sleep.

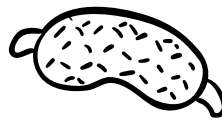
(If you didn’t know or would like to learn more about healthy sleep



tactics, visit the Zenker Wellness Suite in Sumers Rec Center or Student Health Services and/or read the other pages devoted to sleep in this issue).

**Since we all know tactics to facilitate sleep, but choose to ignore our own wisdom, please consider the following pro-tips from my own experience to deal with lack of sleep:**

- 1. Take power naps** – naps can really make a difference in daily energy levels, so aim to take short (<1hr) naps, particularly in the premium naptimes between 11 a.m and 2 p.m.
- 2. Engage in semi-vigorous exercise** – vigorous exercise may lead to injury when feeling fatigued, but a light 30-minute jog or an hour-long dance class to get the heart pumping works wonders to wake up the body.
- 3. Eat an apple** – apples are filled with healthy energy, and the crunch makes even the most tired brain feel more awake. But any kind of food will help energize you during the day.



- 4. Take a cold shower** – A cool shower will shock your body and mind into action. Due to slight discomfort, use this only if the fatigue is particularly strong.
- 5. Sleep early the next day** – lack of sleep accumulates (called Sleep Debt), so getting a good night’s sleep (8-9 hours) after a sleepless night is vital for a healthy body and a healthy mind. Don’t let the sleepless nights carry on for too long because they can lead to detrimental effects to your personal health.
- 6. Chew gum** (especially mint flavored) – Chewing gum moves your jaws and keeps your body above the baseline activity level you want to stay awake. And a minty scent can trigger your hippocampus.
- 7. Drink caffeinated drinks** – Did I even need to list this?



It is important to remember that although these palliative measures for tiredness will help you cope short-term, prevention is always better than treatment. Hence, the best plan of action is to prioritize sleep and actually do as you say!