

Strength Sensei's Top 10 Sleep Hacks

By Charles R. Poliquin

The Strength Sensei

www.strengthsensei.com

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The hyper-productive society we live in right now would have us believe that being productive warrants missing out on sleep. This has become so ingrained that our caffeinated lifestyle have us burn the candle at both ends. We sleep fewer hours and in an attempt to stay productive and awake we resort to stimulants. Sleep-deprivation requires constant stimulant use to keep us productive. As a result, relaxants sales have also skyrocketed since we need them to bring us down at night and help us sleep better. Pop caffeine pills during the day and munch on Valium sandwiches at night, anyone?

How has something so natural become so... unnatural? Not to mention it has very severe impact on our health. How severe you might think? After all, a few missed hours of sleep can't be that bad, right? Well, eventually there is a price to pay and the piper will come to get his due.

Just as food for thought: the 2017 Nobel prize in Physiology and Medicine has been won by Jeffrey C. Hall, Michael Rosbash, Michael W. Young, three researchers who made discoveries in the molecular mechanisms controlling circadian rhythm.

That should tell you how important sleep quality and duration are to our health, especially on the human endocrine system. Sleep is the switch that triggers a cascade of hormonal production that is very far-reaching and yet fragile.

You Can Sleep Into Health... Or the other way around

Studies after studies have linked short nights with increased risks of chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular diseases. For example, fewer than 6 hours of sleep per night has been shown to increase low-grade chronic inflammation and insulin resistance, two metabolic processes associated with the development of those health conditions and a worsening of general health and well-being.

Even only one night of poor sleep can provoke negative changes in appetite regulation and food intake. Restricting sleep to 5 hours or less for just one week has been shown in many studies to decrease carbohydrate tolerance and insulin resistance. So, bad sleep packs a double-whammy: it makes you crave the carb-rich foods while impairing your body's ability to tolerate them well. This has led many scientists to believe that sleep deprivation or bad quality of sleep is a predictor to obesity in children and adults.

Sleep quantity and quality is also closely related to the activity of the immune system. Lack of sleep means a decreased ability to naturally fight off infection. This explains why you're more likely to get a cold or flu after not sleeping well for a few nights.

The metabolic catalyst to this phenomenon is a hormone called melatonin. It is secreted in the pineal gland, a small gland in the brain and its production is triggered by exposure to light. Melatonin levels are meant to naturally increase after sundown and when we sleep to allow our immune system to get to work. This is why sleep helps fight off viruses and infections such as flu and cold.

Melatonin is also the first step in a series of metabolic reaction that leads to the production of many hormones, including cortisol and sex hormones. Ever felt a loss of libido after a few bad nights' sleep? This is the reason why. In fact, it is quite clear in the literature that the most influential factor in one's testosterone production is actually sleep quantity and quality.

What if you're a night owl?

The real 'wake-up call' here, no pun intended, is that there's nothing natural about staying up late and sleeping in. Picture a caveman. Other than accidents or maybe some cultural events like celebrations, he would go to sleep at sundown or not long after, and wake up at the crack of dawn.

For millions of years, human evolution has maintained our sleep patterns in synch with light exposure. This is what our bodies are adapted for. This natural cycle is called "circadian rhythm."

This circadian rhythm dictates that cortisol should be high in the morning to give us energy, mental focus clarity and be ready to manage daily stressors. As the day progresses, our cortisol levels should taper off and our melatonin levels increase. This natural cycle of rising and falling levels of different hormones is what makes us feel wakeful or sleepy at the right time. When we continually stress our system by staying up late at night, we end up disrupting our circadian rhythm. This is the gateway to many dysregulations and why we feel sleepy in the morning and don't want to go to bed at night.

I speak from personal experience on this, as I used to be the type of person that said sleep is for whimps, you can sleep in the cemetery, sleep doesn't really matter, four hours is plenty, etc.

For a very long time I used to work twenty hours a day and now I'm paying the price for it. So, if I can give you a piece of advice, it's not very smart.

If you look at books like *The One Thing*, that make you realize you are only effective about four and half hour a day. I was working twenty hours so the quality was poor except the fact that the total was very high.

So, in 2006 I started to look more and more into it and realized I made a big mistake. And developing sleep hacks became one of my passions.

This is why I feel it's important to give you my 10 best sleep hacks to improve the quality and quantity of your sleep. I hope by now you have come to realize how important sleep is for a variety of reasons from cortisol management, to insulin regulation, to testosterone production.

Sleep Hack #1 - Stay away from screens three hours before going to bed

<https://vimeo.com/247017519/b0982e6a3e>

Now, for most people it is impossible to do, if you are a real estate agent, you are a school teacher, you trade stock, you are a writer, you are a personal trainer and you write programs, not to see a screen is terrible.

First thing you could do though is cut down social media three hours before you go to bed. You don't really need to know what someone's cat look like today... at least cut that source of distraction. Because one of the problem with social media is that it raises your dopamine, dopamine is great for you, before you train.

But if you always stimulate the receptors for dopamine that will end up exhausting you.

Three hours before bed, okay screen time, but no social media, that will make a huge difference, that alone.

But if you cannot make a living without having screen time throughout the day there is a solution: it's the TrueDark™ glasses, they are sold by Bulletproof company. When I first saw this, I was like "fuck, this is bullshit!" but you can't knock it until you try it. You wear these glasses and they make you look like Bono, that's the cool part about it.

Melatonin production is a very light-sensitive process and even a tiny amount of light can mess it up and impair your sleep. Your skin contains photoreceptors that detect light. If you are not sleeping in total darkness, your pineal gland will decrease the production of melatonin, the circadian rhythm regulating hormone, and your adrenals will start synthesizing cortisol. To prevent this, make sure you turn off any electronic devices with LED's and cover the lights with a small piece of electrical tape. Yes, even the tiny red dot on your TV. Block off the light over your bedroom window with a towel if light creeps in. Using blackout curtains is also a good option.

But, they actually block blue light and blue light is what comes from the screens. What will you notice? You sleep well the first night, it's amazing.

Luckily, I live in Colorado, it's very sunny, so I don't need to rely on artificial light. But as soon as I have to turn on the artificial lights I start wearing the glasses.

Now if you live in New York and you work during the day in a room full of overhead lights, I would suggest you bought yourself a pair right away. I've found the other color, the red ones, those are really dark, you can't see much in them.

I use them when I travel overseas because they block the lights inside of planes and allow a much deeper sleep. The TrueDark™ glasses are a gem.

I have no interest in the company so I'm just telling you straight. I have three pairs, I have one in my suitcase, I've got one in my briefcase and I've got one in my house. And then whenever I need them I wear them. But it does make a world of difference when you are wearing them. And it makes a world of difference when you don't wear them. So, it's one of these items that if you take it away you see a huge change in your sleeping pattern. It is worth the investment.

In order to maintain your circadian rhythm, wake-up at the same time every day. That means even on the weekends. Don't sleep in when you stay up late at night. You should instead plan to go to bed a little earlier the next time to make up for it. The most valuable sleep occurs before midnight, so favor it rather than sleeping too long the day after you stayed up later than your regular schedule.

Naps are of course a totally viable option to make up for lost shuteye time. They must be taken before late afternoon/evening however. Otherwise they interfere with sleep

Establishing a sleep ritual will also help get consistent circadian rhythm. Your body thrives on consistency and routines that support the smooth orchestration of the hormonal cascades. Find out what helps you sleep the most and develop it into a consistent ritual. Develop this into a going to bed ritual that will improve your sleeping patterns.

Sleep Hack #2 – Block Off Cortisol With Chamomille & Reishi

<https://vimeo.com/247055299/6e0aee1d87>

One of the things that does disrupt YOUR sleep is making too much cortisol. If you had a very stressful day, you may have had an email that disturbs you. You could have really bad news that a family member is sick. Sometimes there are days where you have a lot of stuff brought on your shoulders.

A great way to improve your circadian rhythm, and thus your sleep quality at night, is to find ways to make you feel sharper earlier in the day. The more wakeful you feel in the morning, the more tired you'll feel in the evening. Things that help are:

- Exposure to sunlight (or artificial sunlight in the winter)
- Cold shower (or using contrast shower)
- Eating a high quality, [neurotransmitter-boosting breakfast](#) within 30 minutes of getting up
- Working out in the AM, if you produce your testosterone in the morning

And you feel so tense that you can't quiet your mind down. What do you do?

You need to bring down your cortisol ASAP. Over the years this is what I have found to be the best thing. Traditional chamomile tea - it has to be organic - mixed in with Reishi mushroom elixir. I will put some links at the end of the pdf so you can find it. Some people don't like the Reishi because they find it too bitter, hardly enough the chamomile kills the taste. So, you boil some water, I try to use two tea bags of each. Put them in the bottom of a cup, pour the water on it, put a saucer on top so the heat stays in and let it still for ten minutes.

Minutes after drinking that phew! your cortisol is going to be way down. You will be able to relax. Because if your cortisol is wired up, it is impossible to relax. You will find that this recipe works wonders. And it will make you go from hedgy, go-to-war type to relaxed. One of the names for

Reishi in one Chinese dialect means the botanical for the professor that lived in his head too much. So, if you tend to worry and you can't focus your mind on something, Reishi is your best friend. When combined to chamomile it works very well synergistically, and they will drop your cortisol rapidly.

You can get a better night's sleep by avoiding those cortisol-inducing activities

- Avoid caffeinated beverages
- Don't consume carbohydrate-laden foods, as the resulting insulin spike will produce an equivalent cortisol spike
- Don't have arguments as they tend to raise catecholamines and cortisol
- Avoid doing unpleasant activities such as paying bills right before bed.
- Avoid medication such as Sudafed, which contains pseudoephedrine. Consult with your doctor or pharmacist before discontinuing any medication or if you have doubts about a drug you are taking
- Avoid watching the news before bed; they tend to favor a negative mindset that disrupts sleep
- Avoid eating too close to bedtime or consuming spicy foods before going to sleep.

Sleep Hack #3 – Use Kava To Improve Sleep Quality

<https://vimeo.com/247055524/6b1f8b0045>

The third sleep hack is actually Kava.

Kava is a plant that you could commonly find in Polynesian islands, so Fiji and so on. It is very popular with locals. You could consume it either as a tea or in capsules. I'm going to warn you, as a tea, it tastes horrendous. It tastes like mud. The active ingredients are the kavalactones and the kavalactones will increase GABA and serotonin which will help you sleep.

You preferably want to drink the extract or the tea about an hour before you go to bed. What I'm going to warn you about is that when you drink the tea or the liquid extract you often get a numb tongue. Why? Because Kava contains two natural anesthetics dihydrokavain and dihydromethysticin and they bind to receptors on the tongue. But nothing to be alarmed about.

I have used it quite a bit in the past in my center in Arizona and I have found it to be quite effective. Also, there are a lot of compounds in Kava that look like benzodiazepines like Valium. So, it's a great product for you if anxiety is preventing you from sleeping. So, give Kava a try.

Concerns about potential liver toxicity associated with Kava consumption sprang after several cases of severe hepatic toxicity possibly associated with the consumption of products containing kava were reported. This escalated into the issue of a consumer advisory in 2002 by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This scare proved to be unfounded and Germany lifted the ban in 2014 as a case of ill-defined herbal drug identity, a lack of quality control, as well as misguided regulatory politics. If Kava can increase liver enzymes with long-term use it seems to be more the case with non-herbal supplements which lack supportive glutathione and targets different metabolic pathways. As always quality is key when consuming botanicals.

Sleep Hack tip #4 – Lower Temperature

<https://vimeo.com/247055812/e79b160ddf>

Sleep in a cool room I'm talking about 16° Celsius and about 65° Fahrenheit. If you pre-set your thermostat so that is the temperature there is when you got to bed. You will see an increase in the quality and the length of your sleep. Tim Ferris is big on that but I've found it to be true from experience.

If you're really want to sleep better, consider investing in a quality mattress. If you are uncomfortable, this will reflect in the quality of your sleep. It is one of the best investments you'll ever make.

Sleep Hack #5 – Take Your Clothes Off

Sleep naked, I got an entire article on my website and the link is in the pdf. But what research shows is that when you sleep naked it actually allows your body temperature to drop better at night. And that's how it should be. And when the body temperature drops better the management of the whole hormonal cascade from cortisol to insulin to testosterone is affected by sleeping naked. So, there is a huge advantage in [sleeping naked](#).

Included in the list of other Zeitgebers such as light exposure, accumulation of adenosine, social interactions, food intake... temperature can be found. This means temperature is integral to the regulation of the circadian rhythm. The corollary being that temperature variance causes sleep onset disturbances.

Anecdotally there is such a thing as Dysautonomia which is a disorder of the autonomic nervous system which results amongst other things in elevated body temperature and takes a heavy toll on life quality and indeed sleep.

Sleep Hack #6 – Stay Away From Electro-Magnetic Pollution

<https://vimeo.com/247057186/c9c471fe81>

Turn off your Wi-Fi and the electricity breaker that goes around your bed. Dr. Joe Mercola is big into it. I was in the habit of turning off my Wi-Fi but Dr. Mercola told me to find out which breaker supply electricity to the area around your bed, and turn that off before going to bed. And the very first night I could sleep far better.

One of the problems with turning off the Wi-Fi is that if you live in an apartment building or if you are in a hotel room, you can't do much about people server. But if you live in a single home dwelling turning off the router will make a huge difference in your sleep quantity and quality.

So, it's a very simple tip, cost-free that actually reduces the electrical bill and is great for you. If you apply that, it's one of these things that I can guarantee you will feel the difference the very first day.

Treat your phone as if it were a high-tech chemical warfare device.

- Turn your phone off.
- Take the battery out.
- And leave it at least 4 meters away from your bed.

If you with your phone close to your head you might as well consider putting your head in the micro-wave. Yes, it's that bad!

Sleep Hack #7 – Turn Your Room Into The Batcave

<https://vimeo.com/247059454/b447edba48>

You have sleep in the bat cave, meaning the room has to be as dark as possible. And no, no, no, no source of light. There is very good research out of Finland that just showed that the more your skin is exposed to light while you sleep, the likelier you are to have breast cancer.

The simple use of ear plugs can improve the quality of your sleep, if you are in a noisy environment. Lowering noises by as little as 30 decibels can have a drastic impact on your sleep quality. White noise such as a fan however, is acceptable.

So even the red dot on the TV, even though your TV is turned off, is showed as a source of light. Light is perceived by the skin, so even if you are wearing an eye mask that light is bothering your sleep. So, what I recommend is you unplug everything in your room and make sure you have thick curtains, drapes, make the room as black as possible.

I have had carpenters set up my room so when I lower the blinds it is as pitch dark as inside a safe. That's how dark it is. But it does allow you to have proper sleep and in my whole house I set up like that, and when guests sleep in the house they say " I am able to sleep well here." Well, yes because you can't see any light, and that's a very cheap way to do it.

When I'm on the road I unplug everything I can unplug, I carry clothes pin to shut the curtain properly, if there is light coming from the bottom of the door I put the bathrobe - they are always too small anyway. I put that and that blocks the light.

So, sleeping in the darkness makes a difference. Whenever I do a consult for a professional team the first thing I try to teach them is how to sleep in the

darkness because it does make a huge difference on the quality and quantity of your sleep.

Not all light is created equal. Science has been investigating the effects of blue light on the brain for some time now. What is blue light? It's light that is in the blue spectrum and comes mostly from LEDs. So think TVs, electronic devices or most types of screen. This light triggers wakefulness in the brain, while red light, such as a fireplace, does not. So while I don't recommend any type of screen time 3h before bed, if it can't be avoided, you can download [F.lux](#), a free program that changes the color spectrum on your computer to mimic sunlight more closely. Another helpful tip is to turn off unnecessary light in the evening to make the house as dark as possible.

Sleep Hack #8 – Get The Right Type Of Magnesium

<https://vimeo.com/247059635/f77578fb8a>

Check your magnesium status.

One of the main reasons why sleep disorders are so common is the western society is actually magnesium deficiency. For my own selfish interest, I have developed a brain-ready magnesium supplement. It has two types of magnesium, it has theanine, it has inositol, it has B6; all interact together to set you up for sleep.

It usually works within five minutes. Some people can't stay awake, the longest people are able to stay awake is 45 minutes. But I'll warn you right now: don't drink, don't drive, don't anticipate to work with any machinery, because I have had a lot of people, for example, I got one of client to talk to him on facetime and after five minutes he got to go .

Tim Ferris loves that product, he sent me a text message to tell me that I should put a warning on the label on how fast it works. About fifteen percent of people find that it disrupts their sleep and that will only last about five to twenty-one days.

What does that is the inositol and that's because it is a form that tends to reset all neurotransmitters. So, in the document I have got the URL where you can buy Yin Reserve. It's only been on the market for three months and we're already in seventy-four country it's one of the most popular products. For Yin Reserve, I take five to ten grams forty-five minutes before bed.

If, for some reason, you have a lot of inflammation in your body, I suggest that you add about 10g of glutamine and two different sources of probiotics while you take it. Trust me you will enjoy that product.

Over the past several decades diabetes has become a growing epidemic. Currently more than 50% of Americans suffer from magnesium deficiency. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this deficiency as a serious health problem. Magnesium plays a key role in more than 350 enzymes in the body. It is involved in virtually every metabolic process. It is the second most abundant intracellular cation. Plus, if health were not incentive enough... consider this:

Magnesium ranks top of the minerals when it comes to fitness and bodybuilding.

Why?

- Increased Torque.

Brilla and Haley from Western Washington University in Bellingham published the results of a 7-week, double-blind study in which magnesium supplemented lifters exerted greater quadriceps force than un-supplemented lifters.

- ATP Production.

Without Magnesium the body cannot produce adenosine tri-phosphate (ATP). ATP transports chemical energy within cells for metabolism. ATP is critically important in bodybuilding.

- Increased Anabolic Hormones.

Research has shown that magnesium is pivotal in Lipid (fat) metabolism and therefore the production of testosterone. Studies also show increased growth hormone and IGF-1 levels with optimal magnesium intake.

- Necessary for Protein Synthesis.

Research has shown a positive correlation between magnesium levels and lean tissue growth rates (protein synthesis).

Sleep Hack #9 – Get Some Extra-Curricular Bedroom Activity!

<https://vimeo.com/247061395/e40f5ec032>

You have heard me say it all the time: avoid stimulating activities before bedtime.

As mentioned earlier social interaction influence the circadian rhythm. Night-time is favorable to one-on-one conversations and introspectiveness. Definitely not the time for high octane brain-storming or fiery arguments. Remember that your actions create your mindset.

That excludes sex, especially with a partner. So, you know sex with a partner and sex alone have very different hormonal response. Don't expect the same result from a sleep inducing perspective from sex with a partner from basically the masturbating domain.

Because some people will play videos games before going to bed, or watch The Punisher, or some form of violence and then they expect they can sleep. Whatever you have seen in the last three hours before you go to

bed will affect your mindset. And it will disrupt your sleep. So, if you are the type of person that watches CNN which are all bad news before you go to bed, it's going to disrupt your sleep. So again I've said avoid screen time but particularly things that are highly stimulating. Makes sense?

You need to realize that several of your habits can contribute to stimulate your mind before going to bed. Avoid doing things such as;

- Watching TV
- Playing video games
- Answering emails or texts
- Working out too late at night
- Leaving your phone next to your bed (and not putting it on “silent.”)

Those will tend to disrupt your sleep by increasing the activity of your brain and boosting cortisol before bed. Not a good thing! Using electronic devices will mess up your production of melatonin in the evening and lead to poorer quality sleep. Develop habits that help you go to bed, but also avoid those that will decrease your ability to get a good night's rest.

Sleep hack #10 – End The Day With Positive Energy

<https://vimeo.com/247071981/d32ee32cef>

The use of a grateful log.

A grateful log is a log in which you write things you are grateful for. It's pretty simple. If you go on my website, and I'll provide the links in the pdf, I've got all the rationale behind it.

But if you write down what you are grateful for it's like you are resetting short term memory in your computer. It allows you to have a better sleep and puts you in a different mindset. It's something I strongly encourage parents to do with their kids.

But kids when they are very young don't know how to write, or it would take forever to do it. But you ask them three questions before you go to bed, the questions would be:

Reading 15 minutes before sleep can also go a long way into helping you sleep better. You should avoid books that are intellectually stimulating and use this time for fun reading - think anything that makes you feel like on a summer holiday. This will lower mental stress and reduce stimulation before bedtime. If you use electronic readers, pick one where you can adjust background lighting.

1) What good did you do to someone today? And they have to think, well I helped Mary do some algebra homework.

2) And the second question is: what good did someone do to you? So, she might say I forgot lunch at home and Suzie gave me half her sandwich. Alright, that's good!

3) And number three is what did you learn today? Most kids before seven can't remember they've learned anything. It's not because of the school system, it's because of the way their short-term memory operates.

What I recommend to parents is to have the kid pick up a book and learn something. A page or two. So, if you want them to learn a foreign language pick up six words before they go to bed. If they love animals they can check snow leopards before going to bed, it doesn't really matter.

But the kid knows three things: they are loved, they love and they are learning something. You as a parent, when you are writing your grateful log, it is very important according to research, what it comes down to, is putting things into writing.

You should write down things you are grateful for that just happened today; things that you want to be grateful for in the future, so it sets your mind up so you can say I am grateful for the week loan I'm getting from the city bank – whatever – and then you should also write at the end how you could be better.

And when you get that off your mind, sleep is far more restorative and you will make more progress.

Further improve your sleeping ritual with those habits

- Do light static stretching or yoga for 15 minutes; this will help bring down your cortisol
- Write an action plan for any unfinished projects or thoughts you might have
- Make positive statements about your ability to go to sleep and get a restful night
- Write down any negative thoughts you have in a journal; this will contribute to stop your mind from focusing on them
- Use positive self-talk to promote good energy
- Use relaxing essential oils such as lavender or take an Epsom salt bath

Parting Words

Sleep does matter! And with these 10 tips you can get rock-solid sleep that will resist even a nuclear blast. Put them in practice and you will be healthier, leaner and make more gains, both physically and mentally. They say you can't out-train a bad diet. Well I say you can't out-sleep a poor lifestyle. Historically the best warmongers were individuals you possessed the coveted ability to sleep at will. Cultivate this asset to conquer your days! So hit the hay!

In Health,

Coach Charles R. Poliquin