

More sex, please... we're insomniacs!

by
Michael Mosley

Are you a chap who just can't drop off? Then clear your cupboards of junk food, fast for 12 hours and make love (even when you're tired), says **Michael Mosley** in his four-week sleep plan for men

ISLEPT well as a young man, but by the time I reached my 40s, I began to show classic signs of insomnia. Most nights I would struggle to drop off – and then find myself waking up at three in the morning with thoughts rushing through my head.

And I am far from alone. More than half of people in the UK aren't getting enough good quality sleep, and the impact on our mental and physical health is frightening – studies show poor sleep is a contributing factor in a host of life-limiting diseases. Even more worrying is the fact that our ability to sleep soundly diminishes with age.

My struggles with insomnia prompted me to explore the science of sleep and to take part in a number of ground-breaking sleep experiments, including a recent one, based at a leading sleep centre, where cutting-edge techniques were used to treat people with a range of chronic sleep disorders. Based on what I learnt, I've created a highly effective plan, which, over a period of four weeks, will create a secure foundation for good sleep for life.

In yesterday's paper, I showed how insomnia hits women hard, but today I shine the spotlight on men, and the ways in which poor sleep impacts the male physiology, and the many reasons why men tend to sleep less soundly as we get older.

Although we all know about the hormonal changes that occur in women at midlife, men are subject to hormonal upheavals too, and these can impact sleep. Levels of the stress hormone cortisol rise as we get older, which can lead to an increased chance of waking up in the night. It's a vicious circle because a poor night's sleep will, in turn, increase cortisol levels, making it harder to achieve good sleep.

Testosterone levels tend to drop as we get older and studies have found that lower testosterone leads to worsening sleep and greater problems with snoring and sleep apnoea (an extreme form of snoring that can interrupt breathing multiple times a night).

I confess I come from a long line of snorers and for years I kept my wife Clare – and probably the neighbours – awake with my racket. Snoring can be caused by the anatomy of your mouth and sinuses, too much alcohol or allergies, but the main reason most people snore is because they are overweight. As we get older and fatter, our throat gets narrower, the muscles weaker and tissues floppier so that air

vibrates as we breathe, producing that horrendous snoring noise.

Men are particularly prone to a snoring-related condition called sleep apnoea that causes you to stop breathing hundreds of times a night and is made much more likely if you are overweight or drink heavily. The condition affects one in four men (and one in ten women) and is extremely

harmful if untreated – starving your brain and body of oxygen every night doubles your chances of sudden death and increases your risk of Alzheimer's and dementia.

When I lost 20lb (9kg) in 2012, I also lost an inch of fat around my neck, and my snoring dramatically improved. So I can tell you with some authority that losing weight will help you sleep better.

What is more, the science shows that sleeping better makes it less likely that you will overeat, which makes losing inches around your waist and neck (the most common cause of snoring and sleep apnoea) that much easier.

As I explained in yesterday's paper, one of the fundamental pillars of my four-week sleep plan, which works for both men and women, is switching to a Mediterranean diet, which delivers all the nutrients your body needs for good sleep and minimises the chemical additives that can hinder sleep.

But by the time you reach week two of the plan, I encourage you to incorporate another powerful dietary tool – time-restricted eating (TRE). This is the simplest and easiest form of fasting – you just increase the length of the normal overnight fast that happens when you sleep by either taking an early supper or a late breakfast.

This will help to strengthen the circadian rhythm that controls the sleep-wake cycle and improve the quality of your kip. It also boosts the release of human growth



GIVE UP THE BOOZE

A few drinks might help you to drop off at night, but heavy drinking inevitably leads to snoring and more fragmented sleep later on. If you drink every night and suffer from insomnia, I urge you to try giving up.

hormone that helps the body repair itself at night, meaning you are more likely to wake up refreshed and restored. Your goal should be to finish your evening meal at least three hours before you go to bed and avoid snacking in the meantime.

MORE EXERCISE WILL CUT THOSE TRIPS TO THE LOO

More than half of all men over the age of 45 find they have to get up in the night to visit the lavatory. Nocturia (waking up two or more times during the night to urinate) is usually caused by your prostate becoming enlarged with age and pressing down on the urethra (although it can also be a sign of diabetes, so if you're concerned, do have a chat with your GP).

The good news is regular exercise can help. A study (2018) by Loyola University in Chicago) found that men who are physically active for one or more hours per week were 13 per cent less likely to report nocturia and 34 per cent less likely to report severe nocturia (waking up

three or more times) than men who did no physical activity.

Exercise is thought to help by reducing body size, improving sleep, decreasing sympathetic nervous system activity (the branch of the nervous system that readies the body for a fight or flight response) and lowering levels of systemic inflammation.

SEX AT BEDTIME GIVES YOU THE ZZZs FACTOR

No matter how tired you feel, don't turn down the opportunity for intimacy – studies show having sex can improve the quality of your sleep. That's because regular sex boosts levels of a hormone called oxytocin (known as the 'love hormone') because it helps human bonding while reducing levels of stress hormones such as cortisol – and this soporific effect is even more powerful in men than women.

Switching to a Mediterranean diet, as recommended by this sleep plan, should be giving your sexual prowess a bit of a boost, too. Studies have shown that foods

Cut down on sugary snacks

IF YOUR sleep has been fractured for some time you may have become reliant on sugary snacks to boost your energy levels during the day. But highly processed foods and fizzy drinks will set you on a blood-sugar rollercoaster that may be trapping you in a vicious cycle of sleeplessness. If you have been increasing your protein and fibre intake, as recommended, you cravings for junk food are likely to decrease, so capitalise on that by clearing your kitchen cupboards of unhealthy food and make a promise to yourself not to buy them.



such as oily fish, olive oil, garlic, onions, shallots, leeks and beetroot help to improve blood flow to the sexual organs and minimise the risk of impotence.

KEEP A DIARY TO LOG YOUR PROGRESS

My four-week plan for better sleep brings together the latest research

to help you retrain your sleep 'muscle' and gradually build the good habits that guarantee top-quality slumber. If you have put in place my suggestions for week one – ensuring your bedroom is comfortable, dark and cosy, establishing set times for going to bed and waking up in the morning, enjoying a Mediterranean-style diet – your sleep quality should be starting to improve. Keep up with your sleep diary and regularly

check your sleep-efficiency score. You should now be ready to add some extra measures to help boost your sleep training.

THE FASTER WAY CAN BE THE BETTER WAY

To maximise your chances of a deep sleep, you can now try to incorporate a little TRE, which

Avoid drinking coffee after lunch



THE caffeine in coffee, tea, cola and energy drinks binds to your brain's receptors for adenosine – the natural hormone that makes you feel sleepy – and keeps you perky in the day.

But this can seriously affect your sleep. The average half-life of caffeine is around five hours, which means if you have a cup of coffee at 6pm, half that caffeine will be still running around your system at 11pm and a quarter is still there

at 4am. Your ability to sleep after a caffeine-fuelled day will vary according to gender, age, weight, genetics and any medication you are on. But if you aren't sleeping as well as you'd like, it's wise to cut back to two or three cups of coffee a day, maximum, and to drink these before lunchtime, preferably not within an hour of waking up. It's better to have your first morning coffee with breakfast. Switch to herbal teas during the afternoons.

means extending the period when your body can rest without having to digest food. I recommend starting with a pattern of 12:12 which means not eating for 12 hours (for example overnight between 8pm and 8am). Try to maintain TRE five days a week. When this becomes easy, you can progress in Week Three of this plan to fasting for 14 hours (14:10) and ultimately to 16 hours (16:8) by Week Four.

Another simple rule is to try not to eat within three hours of going to bed. This gives your body plenty of time to digest and ensures your core body temperature naturally starts to fall as bedtime approaches to help trigger sleep.

ALWAYS PUT QUALITY ABOVE QUANTITY

One very effective strategy for improving sleep is a programme of sleep-restriction therapy. In my new book, I describe how to do this safely, but the idea is, for a few weeks, you continue to get up at the same time each morning but go to bed later in the evening.

By spending less time in bed you ensure that when you go to bed you are tired and sleep deeply.

Once you are not waking up for long periods during the night you can 'reward' yourself with an extra 20 minutes in bed (which means bringing your bedtime forward by 20 minutes). If, on the other hand, you are still finding it hard to drop off, or spending a lot of time in bed awake, I'm afraid you need to keep on with your later bedtime for at least another week. Sleep restric-

tion works, but for some people it takes time.

IT'S TIME TO KEEP THE CLOCK OUT OF REACH

If you wake in the night, resist the temptation to check the clock. Calm your mind, don't get annoyed, and try 'progressive muscle relaxation'.

As you inhale, contract one muscle group (for example, make a fist with your right hand) for five seconds, then as you exhale release the tension in that muscle. As you do so, imagine those stressful feelings flowing out of your body. Relax, then progress around your body from your fingers to your toes, contracting and releasing one muscle group at a time. You should be asleep before you reach your toes.

DON'T TALK YOURSELF INTO STAYING AWAKE

Once you are halfway through the four-week plan, your sleep diary should be showing up improvements in the depth and quality of your sleep. It's time to add a few extra layers to really consolidate your sleep muscle. To start with, make a pact with yourself to stop talking about sleep. If someone asks how the programme is going, say 'great, thanks' (even if you're having a tricky day).

By channelling positive thoughts, you can dial down some of the stress and negativity you might have associated with sleep. Slow

WHERE AM I?

- I'm a hotel with the oldest working lift in London (from 1896), which is probably the last still operated by an attendant, normally a man named John.
- The exiled kings of Greece, Norway and Yugoslavia spent the Second World War here. It's said that Suite 212 was declared Yugoslavian territory for 24 hours so Crown Prince Alexander II could be born on his country's land. After Winston Churchill was kicked out of Downing Street, he moved here.
- Past guests include Cary Grant, Audrey Hepburn (right) and Tom Cruise. Katharine Hepburn got round the ban on trousers in the lobby by using the staff entrance, while Spencer Tracy said he'd rather come here than to Heaven when he died.
- I've hosted Kate Moss's 30th birthday, the late Queen and

Who? What? Where?
OUR fun weekly quiz in which we ask you to figure out people, places and things in the news...

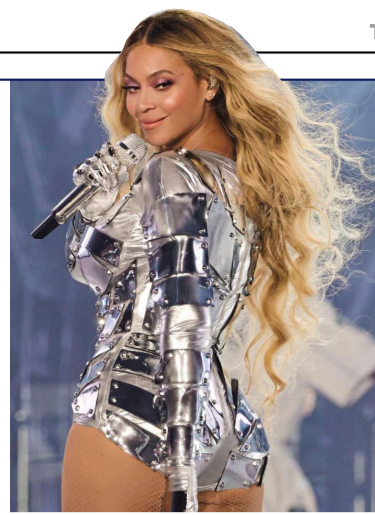


Prince Philip's ruby wedding party, and Charles and Diana's wedding reception.

● Last year, I opened a penthouse, featuring 75 works by Damien Hirst, which costs £60,000 a night. And last week working-class hero Noel Gallagher revealed he spent most of 2023 in a £2,500-a-night suite after his marriage collapsed.

WHO AM I?

- I served my apprenticeship as an assistant to a haberdasher but found my fame on the seas.
- I was hailed as an incarnation of God by Hawaiian islanders – though they ended up brutally killing me. Though to be fair, I was trying to kidnap their king at the time...
- I loved sauerkraut as it kept scurvy at bay. But my crew didn't take to foreign food – until I started serving it every



day for officers. When the ratings saw that, they assumed it was a delicacy and demanded it for themselves.

● I'm known by the title 'Captain' and for 'discovering' Australia. But I was only a lieutenant when I first visited Down Under – 164 years after a Dutch navigator first set eyes on it. Last week my

statue in Melbourne was torn down by those who saw it as a symbol of invasion.

WHAT AM I?

- I was discovered more than 800 years ago when, legend has it, a milkmaid left a pail of milk in the caves in the place I'm named after.
- Robert Falcon Scott took 1.5 tons of me on his Antarctic expedition and Queen Victoria was given a wheel of me, weighing almost half a ton, as a wedding gift.
- David Bradley made an effigy of Beyoncé (left) out of me... while the largest sculpture crafted from me, in Louisiana, weighed 1.4 tons and depicted an alligator in a chef's hat frying a turkey.
- Trade talks have just collapsed over the import tariffs Canada is imposing on me.

ANSWERS: Claridge's, Captain James Cook, Cheddar cheese.

WIREIMAGE / GETTY

**EARWAX?
TRY
CLINICALLY
PROVEN
OTEX.**

Clinically proven **Otex Express** ear drops help break down and remove hardened earwax and reduce the need for syringing. Available without prescription, from Otex - the UK's best-selling range of earwax treatments.

BE CLEAR TO HEAR



» From Page 35

the negative spirals, and work towards thinking of yourself as 'sometimes' having trouble sleeping, rather than slipping into the self-fulfilling prophecy that can come with labelling yourself an 'insomniac'.

WHY BEANS MEANS A GOOD NIGHT'S KIP

Beans, peas and lentils aren't everyone's favourites but they are a highly nutritious form of vegetarian protein, extremely cheap, and they provide a form of soluble fibre that your 'good' gut microbiome loves to feast on. Well fed, these bacterial population manufacture the feel-good hormone, serotonin, which plays a role in regulating appetite, digestion and significantly – sleep.

WALK THIS WAY FOR BEDTIME BLISS

As your sleep quality improves, your energy levels should be creeping back up. This means, if you haven't already done so, it's time to incorporate regular exercise into your daily routine – not just because exercise is very good for almost every aspect of your mental and physical health, but because it will improve your sleep as well. Resistance exercises (strength training) is particularly beneficial.

If you struggle to fall asleep at night, I strongly recommend getting into the habit of a morning walk.

This will expose you to bright light, which helps set your circadian rhythm, meaning you are more likely to feel sleepy at bedtime – and if you throw some strength training into the mix, better still.

DON'T STRESS – TAKE SOME DEEP BREATHS

If low-level stress and anxiety have been getting in the way of your sleep,



PICK UP A COPY OF 4 WEEKS TO BETTER SLEEP FROM WHSMITH
Coupon on Page 80

try these deep breathing exercises, which have been shown to help reduce stress. Begin by taking a slow, deep inhale through the nose, allowing the air to really fill your lungs.

Put a hand on your belly – you should feel it inflate.

Hold it for a count of two, then breathe out slowly through your mouth. Your heart rate will slow and you will start to feel more relaxed.

Alternatively, try this: Breathe in deeply through your nose while mentally counting to four. Hold your breath to a count of two. Breathe out through your mouth to a count of four.

© Dr Michael Mosley, 2023

● Adapted by Louise Atkinson from *4 Weeks To Better Sleep* by Dr Michael Mosley (Short Books, £14.99).

ONLY IN TOMORROW'S DAILY MAIL HOW SLEEP CAN REDUCE RISK OF DEMENTIA