



LANDING STRONG



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## SECRETS FOR SUCCESSFUL SLEEP

Because a good night's  
sleep is a beautiful thing.





*A Guide provided  
by Landing Strong.*

The diagnosis of PTSD, anxiety or depression can often be accompanied by difficulties sleeping. An overactive mind combined with a supercharged central nervous system can make sleep a highly sought after commodity. Without proper rest, our mental functions (memory focus, attention) and mood can be further compromised.



## **TIP 1: FOLLOW A ROUTINE**

Following a routine can be helpful if you have difficulties sleeping. Making small changes, like trying to go to bed at the same time each night, and setting an alarm that will wake you up at the same time every day can make a big difference!



## **TIP 2: SAY GOODBYE TO NAPS**

Resist the urge to nap during the day. This one can be hard, especially after a big lunch or when facing stressful events. Ever had a computer crash when you asked it to do too much? Similarly, we can all be tempted to 'procrasti-nap' when feeling overwhelmed.



### **TIP 3: SET THE MOOD**

Set up a sleep friendly environment. Our environment has a big impact on our sleep quality and duration. Before hopping into bed, be sure to set the mood for sleep. We sleep best in dark, quiet spaces that are slightly cool. Blocking out light, turning down the thermostat a couple of degrees, and wearing earplugs to block out background noise can all help.



## **TIP 4: BE ACTIVE**

Although you may be tired, expending energy is a necessary component of good sleep. Excess cortisol (the hormone released in our fight-flight reaction) presents a huge barrier to restful sleep. A higher intensity workout offers a quick release (e.g. jogging or elliptical trainer). Low intensity, longer duration workouts are often best for those who also struggle with chronic pain (e.g.: walking, gentle swimming or aquafit). There are several weekly exercise programs that can be found online, or you could make up your own. The point is to stay moving.



## TIP 5: MINDFULNESS

Try not to stress about not being able to fall asleep. Worrying may keep you awake, so remind yourself that just lying in bed helps your body to get some of the rest it needs. Mindfulness exercises can focus your attention elsewhere and help you drift off, even if it is as simple as concentrating on your breath.

### **Mindfulness Exercise: Noticing**

*To bring yourself back into the present moment, notice an object in your surroundings that catches your attention. What colour is it? Does this object have meaning to you? Is it a pleasing shape or texture?*

### **Mindfulness Exercise: Kindness Meditation**

*If you are feeling unsettled, try a loving kindness meditation. Begin by visualizing yourself happy and full of energy, and repeat*

*"May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be peaceful".*

*Then extend this thought to someone you love, like a family member or pet. "May they be safe. May they be happy. May they be healthy. May they be peaceful".*

*Finally, wish these thoughts for all persons and living beings.*

*"May we all be safe. May we all be happy. May we all be healthy. May we all be peaceful."*



## **TIP 6: FIND BALANCE**

Be mindful of what goes into your body. Eating a balanced diet and limiting the amount of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine you consume within 6 hours of bedtime can have a big impact. If you plan to go to bed at 10pm, switch to decaf after 4pm. Try limiting your caffeine intake to only one or two cups in the morning. Remember that energy drinks, coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate all contain caffeine. Even Green tea can be high in caffeine so be sure to read your labels carefully.



## **TIP 7: ENJOY THE SUN**

Make sure you are getting lots of natural and bright light during the day. Sitting by a window or going for a walk outside can help you feel more awake and lets your body know it's daytime. Then in the evening, the contrast from light to dark is emphasized, cuing your body that night is falling and it is time to get ready to sleep.



## **TIP 8: DON'T BRING YOUR PHONE TO BED!**

You can set your wake-up alarm to repeat every day so there is no need to look at your phone. Your bed should be a place for two things only; one of them is sleeping, the other is not Netflix.



## **TIP 9: HELP YOUR MUSCLES RELAX**

A hot bath or shower might be a helpful way to coax tense muscles to relax before bedtime. Relaxing music might help set a low key tone. Massage Therapy is also a great way to ease aching joints and encourage muscle relaxation. This, in turn, will help sleep.



## **TIP 10: SPRING CLEAN YOUR EMOTIONAL CLOSET**

Disrupted sleep is often a sign of unprocessed emotions. Tackling trauma exposure is hard, but avoidance keeps things compartmentalized in a tiny closet in our brain, only to spill over subconsciously during the night, often in the form of nightmares or sleeplessness. Consider therapy a form of spring cleaning. The deeper the clean, the greater the relief.



## **TIP 11: CONSIDER THE OPTION OF MEDICATION**

If you have had a disrupted sleep pattern for a long period of time, and nothing seems to help, you may want to have a discussion with your doctor about medication. The range of choices is huge, ranging from Naturopathic remedies to pharmaceutical sleep aids or antidepressants.

*Studies show that a number of medications are helpful in minimizing PTSD symptoms. Most of the time, medications do not entirely eliminate symptoms, but provide symptom reduction, while trauma-focused psychotherapy such as Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure (PE), and EMDR are strongly recommended as the most effective treatments.\**

\* Source: Watts, B. V., Schnurr, P. P., Mayo, L., Young-Xu, Y., Weeks, W. B., & Friedman, M. J. (2013). Meta-analysis of the efficacy of treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 74, e541-550. doi:10.4088/JCP.12r08225



*Writing down your thoughts can help clear the mind, and keeping a to-do list can relieve tension if there is something you need to remember.*

*Although we recommend limiting screen time immediately before going to bed, we realize that it is a part of the daily routine for many people.*

*If you are going to watch a bit of late night TV, try to ensure it is something relaxing, and non-violent. The news or a war movie might not be a great option, whereas a few minutes of a favourite feel-good movie that you have seen before might work well.*

## **TIP 12: "GIVE YOURSELF A BEDTIME STORY"**

Consider spending some time journaling or reading before bed. Since this activity is meant to help you settle down for the night, a light and easy to read novel is best. If you prefer not to read, you might try listening to a podcast instead. There are a variety of shows available for free, from comedy to guided meditation to people sharing their stories and thoughts with the world.

## **CONTACT US**

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Finding Growth Together Following Trauma