

Qi Gong and Sleep

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Having trouble getting a good night's rest is more of a problem than many realize. National Sleep Awareness week, March 29th - April 4th,

2004, was created to help shed some light on this. Surveys conducted by the National Sleep Foundation (www.sleepfoundation.org) reveal that 60% of adults report having sleep problems a few nights a week or more. This results in 40% of adults having daytime sleepiness they consider bad enough to interfere with daily activities at least a few days every month with 20% severe enough that it affects them a few days every week. Every year there are 100,000 fatigue related highway accidents reported resulting in about 1,500 deaths in the US.

Problems with sleep can arise from physical ailments, medications, diet, emotional stress, and lifestyle. If you're experiencing disturbed sleep, it's a good idea to ask your doctor to evaluate if there are any physical problems causing this, but you can do much more than this to help yourself.

Diet can be an important factor when trying to get a good night's rest. Caffeine is a common ingredient in food and drinks that should be avoided. Many people who don't sleep well feel the need to perk up their day with coffee, tea, and soda's that contain caffeine, feeling that these give them more energy. Unfortunately this couldn't be further from the truth.

When you step on the gas pedal in your car, the engine goes faster and you speed up but as you know, this makes the gas tank empty sooner. The faster you go, the sooner you run out of gas. Caffeine works the same way on your body's energy. In effect, it revs up your engine and you temporarily become more alert, but you run out of gas

sooner. Normal signals that your body recognizes as a need for rest become meaningless as you use caffeine to get through the day. By the time you head off to bed your body can no longer naturally relax into restful sleep. By slowly eliminating caffeine from your diet, you can reinstate the natural order of wakefulness and sleep.

Other habits that interfere with sleep are drinking alcohol and eating too much or too late in the day. There are some dietary aids for troubled sleep: oyster shell (available as oyster-shell calcium), whole grains like wheat, brown rice, and oats, reishi mushrooms, mulberries, dill, and basil. Also, if you are not lactose intolerant, a glass of warm milk before bed actually does help.

The atmosphere of your bedroom is important for proper rest. Keep your bedroom a quiet peaceful place. Avoid having your bedroom be a multipurpose room: avoid working in bed, watching TV, reading, or having troubling conversations right before bedtime. Clear out any clutter in your bedroom. The clutter disturbs the energy flow in the room and can affect your sleep.

Finally, slow down the pace of your day. The multitasking that makes you feel so efficient with your time is actually stimulating your body to produce more adrenaline and has a similar effect on your body as drinking more caffeine.

A great Qi Gong exercise to help with sleep is the Triple Warmer Sound. It is a simple visualization that can be done lying down before bed or if you wake up too early and can't get back to sleep.

Triple Warmer Sound

The triple warmer or triple heater is not exactly an organ in the western sense although in Chinese medicine it serves the function of an organ system. It includes the combined energies (or fires) of three areas of the body, the head, the chest, and the abdomen. The upper warmer relates to the energy of the mind/third eye, the middle warmer relates to the energy for respiration and heart, the lower relates to digestion and

longevity. You can think of the triple warmer as the combined energies or synergistic qualities of the whole body. Doing this exercise helps to relax and sooth the affects of too much "heat" in the body. This heat relates to the body being too revved up to get to sleep at night. This sound is especially good for clearing the heat and improving your sleep.

Lie down on your back and place your arms by your sides, palms facing up. Exhale and make the following sound. "Heee". Form your mouth as if you were going to say "He" and just blow out. You should just hear the "H" sound. As you exhale and make the sound, imagine your body flattening out like there was a big rolling pin rolling gently from the top of your head down to your feet and flattening you out like a sheet of paper. Inhale and imagine you are filling with light flowing energy. Relax as long as you want. Repeat as many times in a row as feels good.