

Essential **key** number 5:

quality sleep

bring on the **zeds**

*Sleep is the golden chain that ties health
and our bodies together.*

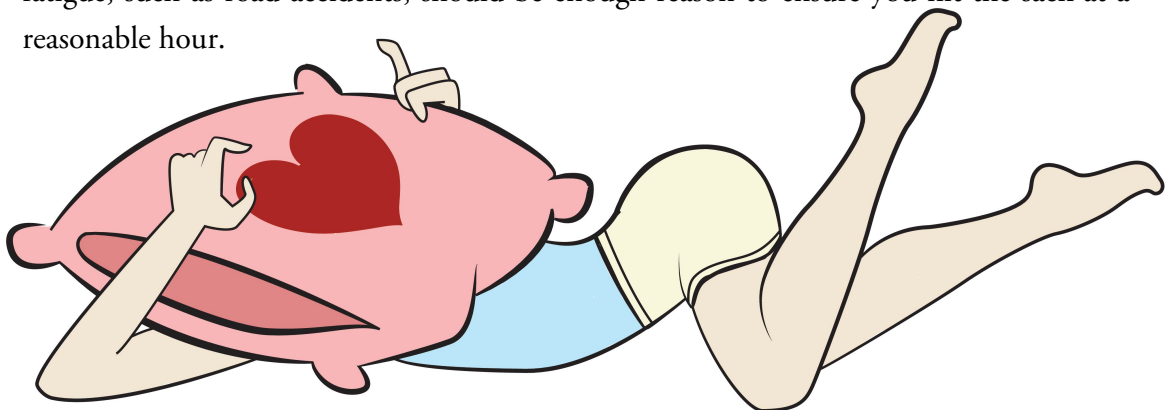
- Thomas Dekker

Show me a depressed or unhappy person and I will show you someone who in all likelihood has trouble in the sleep department. Whether it is trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, getting up in the morning, or staying awake in the daytime, problematic sleep goes hand in hand with most forms of depression. **Often disturbed sleep is just a symptom of being depressed in some capacity.**

Although we spend about a third of our lives asleep, and generally sleep every night (or try to), how many of us actually know exactly what sleep is? To put it simply, **sleep is the natural state of bodily rest.** It is like putting the mobile phone on the charger. You are renewing the body's energy stores. A good night's sleep makes you more alert, awake, alive and enthusiastic.

Missing out on the zeds our body needs to function can lead to poor judgement, loss of motivation, fatigue, moodiness, a shortened attention span and reduced memory. What do all these symptoms have in common? They are all linked with depression, and can cause the sufferer to spiral down into a deeper state of anxiety and irrational thinking.

As the demands on our waking lives increase so too does the need for quality sleep. You cannot expect your body to function properly at work, driving the kids to school, or catching up with friends, without the necessary shut-eye. The dangers associated with fatigue, such as road accidents, should be enough reason to ensure you hit the sack at a reasonable hour.



If you are serious about overcoming depression or simply being more happy, getting a good night's sleep must be a priority. **Regular sleep is necessary for survival.** It preserves the body – with a lack of it linked to premature ageing. While it is as important as food and water, most of us do not get enough of it.

Too few people get a full eight hours, with sleep seen as an indulgence or luxury instead of a requirement for good health. Adequate sleep is one of the most important lifestyle patterns to heal your mood. Sleeping allows the brain to slow down and muscles relax. Dreaming sets your mind free to work on unresolved anxieties and fears.

When we doze off our bodies produce melatonin. Depression has been directly linked to a deficiency in this natural hormone. Melatonin has been shown to heal the body. When we go into a deep sleep we are creating an environment that allows for the correct repair of tissues and the immune system.

Studies have shown that sleep deprivation hinders the healing of wounds on rats. **Children who miss out on the required shut-eye have experienced stunted growth.** Just as we need a good diet of food, so we also need a good diet of rest.

Research shows that going to bed early and rising early gives our body the best chance of fighting off depression. The brain produces serotonin most efficiently in the two hours after sunrise, while it is during the two hours before midnight that the brain produces ample supplies of dopamine for the next day.

The brain continues to be productive, but these times are the most important and need to be followed whenever possible. While I try to stick to this routine there of course will be days when life gets in the way. But with a good backup supply of dopamine in your sleep bank, you can afford to stay up late sometimes.

Hints on getting a good night's sleep:

- Do not eat a meal just before bed
- Do not exercise within two hours of going to bed
- Do not have caffeine or alcohol before bed
- Only use your bedroom for sleeping, lovemaking and relaxing
- Allow yourself an hour to wind down before going to bed
- Try to stick to the same sleeping schedule seven days a week
- Drink a cup of hot milk with wild honey or a herbal tea such as chamomile before bed
- Burn some lavender oil in the room before bedtime, or put a drop of lavender essential oil on your pillowcase.

Difficulty in sleeping is often stress-related.

Planning for sleep as you would plan for a special diet is not as fuddy-duddy as it sounds. Do whatever it takes to ensure you get between seven and eight hours a night (that is the general guide, but discover what works best for you). Listen to your body.

To stop my ugly side from revealing itself, I would make sure I was in bed by 11pm. I gave up my band to ensure more shut-eye, then I eventually changed jobs so that I could work hours that were better suited to what my body needed to function at its optimum. It is all about making lifestyle choices that serve you.

MY STORY

It is amazing how a lack of sleep can unexpectedly throw you into the cranks of even worse, a bout of depression. During the lowest points of the depression I experienced in my early twenties **I was my own worst enemy**. I was starting work at 4am – something I had done for many years, but mixed with late nights, and any interaction with others would turn into a war zone.

At the time I was playing at least one gig a week with my band. By the time we played and I packed up my drum kit and drove home it would be about 2am. I would get a minuscule hour of zeds before my alarm went off to begin a new day at the office. By the time I finished my shift at 11am, I was exhausted, both physically and mentally – and in no state for any type of social interaction.

The days that I worked weekends I would come home to my then partner and bite his head off. No matter what he would say or do, I would somehow manage to pick a fight about something. And because I was so cranky, I would refuse to nap, which is what my body was calling out for – **I was depriving my body of what it needed: a good night's sleep.**

During this time I kept falling deeper and deeper into my depression. It was not until I quit the band and found a job where I was not working the 4am shift every weekend that I began to recover. My new job saw me work the 11.15am to 6.45pm shift. It was a dream job – a job I loved, allowing me to have a social life, and best of all, I got the right amount of sleep for my body.

But while it is important to get *enough* sleep, it is possible to *oversleep*, which in itself can make you lazy and lethargic, leading to depression. Personally I find between eight and nine hours is perfect for me.

Not knowing when it is time to go to bed is another deal-breaker. So many times, the night would end in tears because I had not gone to bed when my body was telling me to. I was like a ticking time bomb. 11pm would hit and I would be out to pick a fight. My suicide attempts almost always happened late at night.

By morning, whatever was on my mind the night before, and what had sparked the argument, was irrelevant. It was not the end of the world and certainly not fighting material, but in the midst of tired eyes I could not recognise this and pushed on until things got nasty.

The only thing I would be left with when morning came was a **'depression hangover' – an overwhelming sense of guilt from the way I had acted.** It was embarrassing and I felt stupid and angry at myself for treating my then partner with such contempt. **The person you are closest to is often the one who cops it the worst.**

My 'hangover' was dangerous in itself, as my self-directed guilt would fuel another bout of depression. It was a vicious cycle. My tiredness would make me emotional and prone to picking fights. The pain I would inflict on others would leave me feeling guilty and lead to suicidal tendencies.

FACT: Randy Gardner holds the Guinness World Record for intentionally having gone the longest without sleep. In 1965 he stayed awake for 264 hours (about eleven days) for a high school science project. But I wouldn't be rushing off to break any record. He experienced significant deficits in concentration, motivation, perception and other higher mental processes during his sleep deprivation.



Chapter from
[The Upside of Down: A personal journey and toolkit for overcoming depression](#)

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