



Sleep your way to the top

Is sleep really the answer to being smarter, happier, maybe even richer? Science says yes.



First it was yoga, then it was juicing, then it was mindfulness. But now, there's a new way to be your very best self, to rapidly ascend the career ladder, to be healthy, productive, beautiful and happy. And guess what? You've been doing it all your life: it's as simple as sleep.

In *The Sleep Revolution*, *The Huffington Post* co-founder Arianna Huffington shares how she transformed her life "one night at a time" through the power of sleep. Get eight hours a night, says Arianna, and the world is our oyster: we'll be smarter, happier and more successful at work.

It's not just Arianna who recognises the value of a good snooze: sleep is a booming industry, with luxury sleep retreats, hi-tech tracking devices and countless apps promising to help us catch that forty winks in the most efficient way possible.

About last night...

But a 2014 study showed that Singaporeans get the least amount of sleep in the world. According to the data - collected by the smartphone app Entrain - people in Singapore get just seven hours and 24 minutes a night, nearly an hour less than people from the Netherlands, who get the most.

Do we really need to be making sleep such a priority? Surely the odd all-nighter can't hurt too much? And isn't everyone tired? According to Dr Timothy Sharp, author of *The Good Sleep Guide*, despite an

increased awareness of the importance of sleep, we're ignoring how crucial it actually is.

"Many people underestimate the consequences of not getting enough sleep, thinking they'll 'just' feel tired," he says. "But the reality is that lack of sleep has far more significant effects... [and] affects pretty much every aspect of living."

Plus, he adds, at a time when we're more educated about the importance of nutrition and exercise when it comes to a healthy body, we are lagging behind when it comes to sleep.

"We all know that physical health and well-being are important, but most people just focus on diet and exercise," says Dr Timothy. "Sleep is just as, if not more, important. It's very hard to be happy and healthy if you're sick and tired; and unfortunately, many of us are tired."

With our lifestyles more hectic than ever, increased pressures to work late and the inability to switch off from technology becoming a very real problem (with smartphones often sleeping on our pillows beside us), is it any wonder there's a sleep deprivation epidemic?

Professor David Hillman, chair of the Sleep Health Foundation, says it's only getting harder to doze off.

"Sleep is under greater pressure than ever before because of the competing demands for our time," he says. "Social media, the internet and the immediate availability of information from other time zones - at times when we should be asleep - are enormous temptations to short-change sleep."

When people try to cheat sleep, they function below their best, says Professor Hillman.

Dr Kenny Pang, an ENT and Sleep Specialist at Singapore's Asia Sleep Centre, agrees. "Sleep is one of the most important activities of our daily lives," he says. "We sleep a third of our lives; the average person sleeps for 26 years. Sleep affects our basic mood, temperament, well-being, memory, relationships, concentration, productivity, and income. Sleep is all it's cracked up to be - and more."

The science of sleep

So what goes on in our bodies when we're slumbering?

"During sleep, we cycle through five distinct stages," explains Alexandra Agostini from the University of South Australia's Centre for Sleep Research. "Each stage serves an important purpose, from helping us remember and learn things and assisting us with controlling our emotions to promoting physical growth and repair."

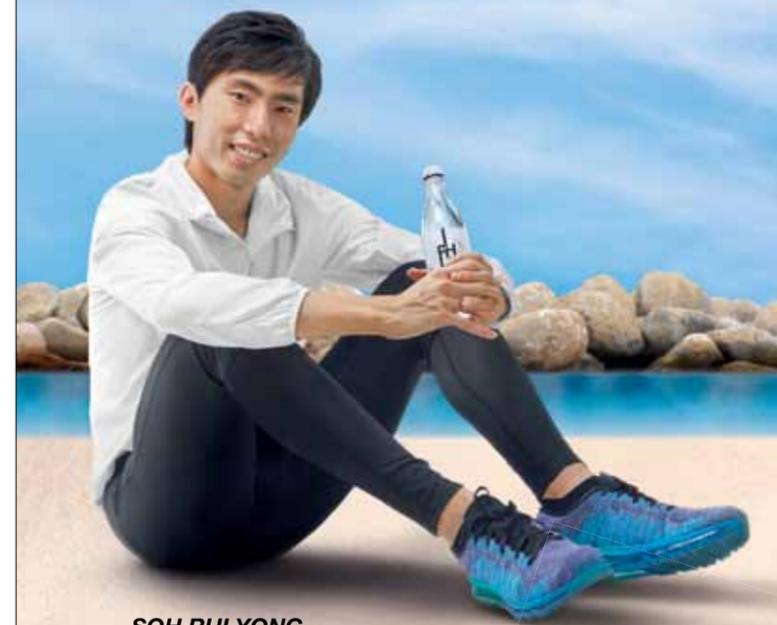
Clearly, the importance of a good night's sleep is no passing fad to be tossed aside along with juicers and yoga mats: sleep is crucial not only to our health, but to all aspects of our daily lives.

Maybe when the lights go out, it's worth spending a little less time scrolling through Instagram and a bit more time counting sheep to make those 26 years in bed really count.

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