

WEEK 1

Getting the Best Sleep of Your Life

Part 1: Why sleep drives performance

As I mentioned in the introduction, I began this course with a lesson on sleep for an important reason. I didn't start with how to manage email, or how to eat better, or how to avoid procrastination, because all of those things – *every single one of them* – are secondary to sleep.

Why? Because sleep fuels performance. It determines the quality of our thinking. It affects the way we feel. And it has the potential for elevating our performance in ways most of us can't even begin to imagine.

Now, that's a strong statement. Let me back it up with a study that I know you'll find interesting. Just a few years ago, Stanford University researchers took 11 members of the school basketball team and enrolled them in an experiment. The study was simple: These 11 players were made to sleep for 8 and a half hours every night, for 5 weeks straight. Everyone else on the team continued with their regular sleep regimen, which, on average, was about 6 ½ hours of sleep per night.

Then, at the end of the 5 weeks, the two groups were compared. The results were stunning – even for sleep experts. Here's what they found: The players who kept their normal sleep routine performed exactly the same at the end of the study as they did at the beginning. No surprise there.

But the group forced to get more sleep? It was almost like they became different players. Their free throw percentage shot up by 9%, their 3-point shooting jumped 9.2%, and they were even running faster, shaving half a second off their sprint time.

Not sure if what they were seeing was possible, Stanford's experimenters then repeated the study with athletes from other sports. They were curious: What impact would sleep have on swimming, and tennis, and football?

What they found was incredible: In every single sport they tested, performance skyrocketed with better sleep. In swimming, athletes jumped off their block faster when the race started, they completed turns more quickly, and shaved almost a full minute off their 15-meter sprint. In tennis, players hit fewer faults, ran faster, and got to more balls. In football, players became quicker, had more strength, and experienced less fatigue.

And the results aren't just temporary – they affect the length of an athlete's career. Recent studies have looked at the amount of sleep a player gets each night, and the number of years they play. In Major League Baseball, the more sleep a player feels on a day-to-day basis, the shorter their career.

Now, why would sleep have such a profound impact on players' results? Is it all because the athletes are getting a little more rest?

Actually, no. Many of us tend to view sleep as a time when our brains turn off – at least temporarily. But in fact, there's a lot that's going on when we sleep – and much of it is essential to top performance. That's because the brain doesn't shut off when we sleep. Quite the contrary – sleep – as you're about to discover-- is an active process.

Here's just a glimpse of what goes on inside your brain while you're asleep. When you sleep, your brain undergoes a series of processes that ensure you perform at your best. It does this, for one thing, by getting rid of toxins and dead cells that build up over the course of the day.

Your body uses sleep to produce hormones and proteins that bolster immune function, which prevents you from getting sick. This is why people who sleep only 6 hours a night are 50% more likely to come down with a virus than people who sleep until they're rested.

Another great benefit of sleep is the nightly release of growth hormone. Growth hormone makes your bones stronger and increases your muscle mass.

Many people go to the gym because they want build muscle. Well, muscle growth doesn't happen when you're lifting weights – it happens after you leave

the gym, put your head down on your pillow, and allow your body to produce growth hormone. So if you're going to the gym to bulk up and you're skimping on sleep, chances are, it's going to take you much longer to see the results you're hoping for.

One of the biggest mental benefits of sleep is the way it helps us consolidate new information and form long-term memories. When we don't sleep, we don't remember. And remembering isn't just a luxury – it's at the core of learning. You can't learn anything without remembering previous successes and failures. That means if you want to get better at anything, you need quality sleep.

And that's not all – not even close. Because research tell us that nearly everything we do benefits from a good night's rest. Here's a quick summary of just some of the outcomes linked to higher quality rest:

- Better alertness
- Greater energy and stamina
- Improved cognitive functioning
- Better judgement
- Stronger productivity
- Fewer mistakes
- Longer life

Good sleepers tend to live longer. And they don't just stay alive longer – they tend to have a richer, more meaningful experience because for them, most days are happier.

Here's a fascinating finding you may have experienced personally but never quite appreciated:

Research indicates that how well we sleep has a stronger impact on our day-to-day happiness than how much we earn for a living. And that's important, not just because it means a happier life – it also affects our level of success.

In fact, when we look at the research on super sleepers -- people who consistently fall asleep when they want to and wake up feeling refreshed – we see that they reap precisely these benefits. Studies show that they are 25% happier, 30% more able to achieve their goals, and 40% less stressed.

And consequently, they are also significantly wealthier.

When you look at these results, and you take a minute to let them sink in, you realize something important: Sleep doesn't cost time – *it creates time*. The better your sleep, the faster you learn and the less you make mistakes. Compared to when you're exhausted, it's almost as if you're operating at a different speed.

Let's take a moment now to see if you're getting enough sleep. I'm going to read you 5 yes or no questions from an assessment designed by sleep experts at Cornell University. All you need to do is count the number of times you say yes.

- Does a heavy meal, low dose of alcohol, warm room, boring meeting or lecture ever make you drowsy?
- Do you need an alarm clock to wake up at the right time?
- Do you hit the snooze button to get more sleep?
- Do you fall asleep while watching TV?
- Do you sleep extra hours on weekends?

So how many times did you say Yes? Was it more than once? Because according to Cornell University researchers, if you said YES to any of these, you are sleep deprived to some degree.

But take heart. Because if you did do poorly, you are not alone: Most people are moderately to severely sleep-deprived. In fact, 3 out of 4 people get less sleep than they should.

And what happens when we don't get enough sleep? Well, for one thing, we experience long term health consequences, including hypertension, gastrointestinal disorder, diabetes, and colon cancer.

And it's not just physical health. Our mental health is affected every bit as profoundly: Sleep deprivation changes the way we see the world. Upsetting things are much more upsetting when you're tired.

Your anxiety spikes, and that's not just uncomfortable – it affects your behavior. You're much more likely to blow things out of proportion, and lose your temper with colleagues and loved ones.

Your behavior changes in other ways, as well. You also become more risk-averse, meaning you take fewer risks. Now, you might think, well that's great –

I'll make safer decisions. But what it also means is you're less likely to take a chance on meeting someone new, or engaging in new experiences. That's a serious liability if your job requires networking and building new connections.

Sadly, you also become a little uglier! You've probably heard the phrase "beauty sleep". That's a real thing.

When you're young, the skin on your face is smooth and firm because of the protein collagen. As we age, our body naturally produces less collagen, which is unfortunate. And lack of sleep makes it worse.

That's because sleep loss causes stress and stress disrupts collagen production. So you get fine lines and dark circles under your eyes, at a premature age.

And it doesn't end with bad looks. Poor sleepers also tend to gain weight. Lack of sleep changes your hormone secretion, because when you're tired, your body needs more energy to keep everything running, so it tells your brain to consume more food.

Just one night of poor sleep can lead to dramatic changes in appetite. This is why, compared to people who get a full night sleep, people who sleep 6 hours a night are 23% more likely to be obese, people who sleep 5 hours a night are 50% more likely to be obese, and people who sleep 4 hours a night are 73% more likely to be obese.

A lot of diets tell people to eat less or exercise more --but they're neglecting a key ingredient. If you want to maintain your weight, you absolutely need to sleep properly, or it's going to be much harder for you to feel full and resist unhealthy foods.

Perhaps most disturbingly, being tired causes you to lose your objectivity when it comes to judging your performance. Researchers at University of Pennsylvania did a study, where they allowed one group of participants to sleep a full 8 hours, and limited the other groups to 4 and 6 hours. They then looked at changes in the groups' performance over 14 days.

Here's what they found: Those who were allowed to sleep a full 8 hours performed the same throughout the study – no surprise there. Meanwhile, the groups allowed 4 hours and 6 hours of sleep steadily declined with each passing day.

Now here's the startling thing: When participants graded their own performance, they recognized that it declined for the first few days, but as the study went on, they thought it leveled off. But that was not true. In fact, they continued declining every single day.

And that's one of the biggest dangers of the type of sleep deprivation many of us are experiencing. After a while, you stop recognizing just how much better you'd be if you got enough rest.

Now, most of us already know instinctively that we're better off sleeping a full night, and yet we rarely do. Getting enough sleep, as it turns out, is surprisingly hard – why?

The reason can be summarized in a simple sentence: There is a fundamental mismatch between the way most of us work and the way our bodies are designed to operate.

Simply put, we evolved for a different time and place. For more than 99% of history, humans would get up at sunrise, spend their days exploring the outdoors, and return home at sunset, to sleep in a cold, dark, silent cave. That's the environment and lifestyle our bodies were built for. But that's no longer the world we live in.

To appreciate just how far removed we are from our ancestors, take a look at this graph. It represents the course of human evolution. What you'll notice is that 90% of our history was spent as hunters and gatherers; and what percentage of our history has been spent in an office? A tiny, tiny fraction - less than 1%.

Human beings were not designed to sit in front of a computer. The human body was built to move, and explore, and be outdoors. Today, of course, we no longer spend much of our time hunting or gathering, but we're still operating with a body that is built for just that. This creates major, major compatibility problems. And nowhere is that incompatibility more prominent than in the domain of sleep.

For millions of years, the sun provided the only source of light on earth. Each night, as the sun went down, the darkness would lead our bodies to produce hormones that made us sleepy.

Then, around 150 years ago, everything suddenly changed with the introduction of the light bulb. There was light on-demand, which enabled people to stay up long after the sun had set.

Today, we spend 90% of our time indoors, and the result is that we often don't get enough light during the day but, paradoxically, get too much light at night. And that mistimed lighting is having a profound effect on our body's functioning.

And not just the timing – it's also the intensity of the light we're exposed to indoors. To understand why the light of your television and smartphone is so disruptive, it helps to have a brief understanding of the physiology of sleep.

Inside your brain, within your hypothalamus, is a tiny structure called Supra-Chiasmatic nucleus (or SCN for short). The SCN has a simple but important role: Its job is to read cues in your surroundings and to determine the time of day so that your body can synchronize to your environment. When your SCN believes it's daytime, it sends signals telling your body to be alert. And when your SCN believes it's nighttime, it sends signals that make you sleepy.

Now, the primary way the SCN detects time of day is through light. So, in the morning, when you wake up, throw open your shades, and encounter sunlight, your SCN sends out a message to *raise* your body temperature and *suppress* the release of melatonin, a hormone that makes you drowsy.

The trouble is, the SCN is fairly dumb. It can't tell the difference between real sunlight and the light of a computer screen. So when you sit in front of your iPad, you confuse your brain's SCN into thinking it's the middle of the day.

The reason the SCN gets confused is that electronic devices, including computers and smart phones contain blue light, which in nature, is found mainly in daylight. To your brain, 10 minutes at midnight with a smartphone is the equivalent of an hour long walk in bright daylight.

Today, of course, it's hard to avoid blue light after hours, but our brains haven't adapted. We're still operating with a brain that's built for another time. And when you surround yourself with screens right before bed, you make it much harder to fall asleep because your SCN isn't telling your body to wind down.

So, sleep quality has a lot to do with the amount of light you're getting in the evening.

Another factor that affects your sleep is coffee, which contains caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant that raises alertness and blocks our bodies from getting sleepy. What most people don't realize is that coffee has a half-life of 5-6 hours, meaning that if you drink a mug of coffee at 6pm, 50% of that caffeine will still be in your system at 11pm. So while your body may be tired later in the day, your mind is still racing, preventing you from winding down.

Many people try to compensate for caffeine and exposure to their screens by taking sleeping pills. In fact, the use of sleeping pills tends to correlate with education. The more educated you are, the more likely you are to take sleeping pills.

But sleeping pills are not a very good solution. The reason is that many of these medications stay in our system for too long. And so, you'll fall asleep, sure. But you'll wake up feeling groggy, as if you're hung over.

Sleeping pills also have serious long-term side effects, and have been linked to dementia and memory loss. And so, over the long term, pills are not a solution.

Another substance that can undermine sleep is alcohol. As most of us know, alcohol can be relaxing and make you drowsy. And so a lot of folks will have a few drinks after work, or a nightcap before bed. And yes, alcohol will cause you to fall asleep quickly.

The trouble is, sleeping with alcohol in your bloodstream prevents you from getting restorative sleep. You fall asleep quickly, but after a few hours, you have a hard time staying asleep and get up more frequently than you otherwise would. The end result is a restless night of unsatisfying sleep. We're going to talk more about alcohol in just a little bit, but for now, the important thing to keep in mind is not to use alcohol to induce sleep, because although it will help you fall sleep, it won't give you the kind of sleep that energizes you.

So, if we can't take sleeping pills, and we can't drink alcohol, and we're not going back to living outdoors -- what can we do to improve the quality of our sleep?

Fortunately, once you understand the physiology of sleep, there's a lot you can do to create the conditions your body needs to sleep soundly. Over the next few videos, I'm going to tell you exactly what you can do at different points in your day to optimize your sleep. It all starts with our next module, on actions you can take during the day.

I'll see you there.

Part 2: Actions to take during the day

Ok, so we've gone over a good chunk of the research – let's start talking about practical things we can do to leverage those insights and improve our sleep quality.

When we think about sleep, we often think about the things we do right before bed. But in fact, what the research tells us is that the choices we make in the last few hours of our day are just part of the equation. What most people don't realize is that our behavior over the course of the day can significantly impact our ability to get quality rest at night.

Let's take a look at some day behaviors that research shows can improve sleep quality.

The first is, as much as possible, get outdoors. Exposure to sunlight keeps your SCN calibrated, so that you're alert during the day and tired in the evenings. The more daylight you soak in during the day, the better you'll sleep at night.

It's why so many of us sleep well when we're on vacation – we're outdoors for hours – and that's a big change from our daily routine at home. You can get the same benefits even when you're not away by building in opportunities for getting outdoors during the workday.

Taking walks during the day – or taking phone calls outside – can help -- but that's not the only option.

Sitting near a window can also help. In fact, studies show that on average, employees whose offices have windows get 46 min more sleep every night. That's not a small number!

And the benefits of daylight have far reaching consequences, well beyond sleep. Research indicates that our mood lifts when we're exposed to more daylight.

It's because daylight prompts our body to produce more serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter that's linked to positivity and creativity. It's why we tend to be more productive and like our job more when we sit near a window.

Remember, being in daylight is what your body was designed for – and the more access you have to it, the better you'll feel.

A second thing you can do during the day to improve your sleep quality is to leverage exercise. Even as little as 10 minutes of exercise per day can dramatically improve the quality and the consistency of your sleep.

For one thing, it's because movement tires the body, which increases the chances that you'll be sleepy later in the day, when the time comes for rest. But that's not the biggest reason exercise is essential.

The biggest reason is that when you exercise, you reduce stress, which helps you wind down more easily and relax when you get to bed.

Now, if you are planning to exercise, here's one thing to keep in mind - avoid exercising too late. Here's why: When we exercise, the movement gets our heart pumping, and raises our body temperature. And the higher your body temperature, the harder it is for you to fall asleep.

On average, it takes up to 6 hours for the body to fully cool down after exercise and hit a temperature conducive to sleep. And so, if you want to time your exercise in a way that promotes sleep, the ideal time is 5-6 hours before going to bed. In other words, if you want to be in bed at 11:00pm, visiting the gym in the late afternoon is perfect, because 5 hours later your body temperature will have dipped back down, which is ideal for falling asleep.

A third suggestion is to eat intelligently. The food we consume throughout the day has a surprisingly strong impact on our sleep. In particular, eating saturated fats and sugar is associated with a harder time falling asleep.

The reason is simple: Fat requires the body to work overtime, which makes it harder for us to feel comfortable. And so, regularly eating a cheeseburger and French fries – especially for dinner – causes your sleep quality to suffer.

And then there's sugar, which raises arousal. The more artificial sweets you consume, the more your body craves sugar, and the harder it is for your body to rest.

Just last year, Columbia University released a study in which participants were divided into 2 groups.

In the first group, people were allowed to eat anything they wanted. In the second group, people were given a diet designed by a nutritionist to minimize saturated fats and sugars, and maximize fiber and protein.

They then measured how long it took participants to fall asleep in the lab. The result? The group allowed to consume the foods and beverages of their choice took an average of 29 minutes to fall asleep. But those who followed the nutritionist's diet? Only 17 minutes.

And so the takeaway here is: Do your best to minimize soda, pastries and deep fried food...these take longer to digest and keep you awake.

But those aren't the only dietary recommendations. Let's talk about a few foods it's best to limit during the day. Earlier, we talked about caffeine, which stays in our bodies for longer than we think. Caffeine has a half-life of 5-6 hours, which means if you drink an espresso right now, 6 hours from now, half that caffeine will still be in your blood stream.

And, in fact, studies show that having caffeine in the afternoon doesn't just lead to it taking longer to fall asleep, it also causes sleep disruptions – and in many cases, it's not conscious. So you wake up feeling tired, and you're not sure why.

As a general rule it's best to cut off caffeine at 2pm. Try to give yourself at least 8 caffeine-free hours before bedtime.

Now, sadly, coffee isn't the only source of caffeine – dark chocolate, which is quite healthy because of its antioxidants, can be rich in caffeine. And so, if you're eating chocolate during the day – and again, it's good for you – try to do so the first half of the day, not in the evening.

Now, in fairness, there are person to person differences when it comes to sensitivity to caffeine. Some people can drink coffee in the afternoon and not be impacted by it. Personally, I am not one of them, but I have found that if I eat a few chocolate covered almonds in the evening, I'm ok.

In general, if you're having trouble falling asleep and you're a bit of a chocaholic, try avoiding chocolate in the evening for a few days, and see if it makes a difference.

Lastly, I want to give you one more recommendation for during the day. This one is easy to implement, but can be immensely impactful.

One of the reasons we often have a hard time getting to bed on time is because we arrive at home so late. At the end of the day, it can be so tempting to try and get just one more thing done. It's tempting to fire off one more email and wrap up one more work task at the end of the day, and then, before you know it, it's late and you're leaving for home a lot later than you'd planned.

And the truth is, it's hardly ever worth it. The last 15 minutes of the day is when we're thinking least clearly and are most prone to mistakes. That's why I strongly recommend scheduling a work-down call at the end of each day.

A "work-down" call is the opposite of a "wake up" call. Instead of hoping you'll remember to leave the office, automate this by reminding yourself to wind down at the end of the workday.

I have 2 alarms: One is at 5:45 and tells me to start wrapping up and close out any loose ends. Then the second arrives at 6:15, and that's my signal to leave. I set my alarm to my Fitbit, which silently vibrates on my arm and reminds me to start closing out my day.

I've found this method to be tremendously helpful in getting me to focus for the last 30 minutes of the day, as well as getting me home early enough to be with my family before dinner.

And remember, the earlier you wind down, the sooner you can turn your attention to enjoying a relaxing evening, which is an important ingredient for getting a good night of rest.

In our next video, we'll look at what you should do after you've wrapped up work, and arrived at home.

I'll see you there.

Part 3: What to do when you arrive home

Ok, so let's say you're sitting near a window, exercising, and leaving work on time. What else can you do to get higher quality sleep? Let's turn our attention now to what you should do once you arrive at home

The starting point is planning. It is absolutely critical to identify an exact time when you want to be in bed. And when you do this, be specific.

Trying to go to bed "as early as possible" is rarely effective because it doesn't give you a clear idea of what success looks like. Instead, give yourself a precise time.

So what time should you be in bed? Here, you want to start with the end in mind. To choose a time, think about when you need to get up in the morning and work backwards.

Studies tell us that most people need between 7 to 9 hours of sleep. But it's not enough to know averages, because every person is different. How much sleep you need depends on your genetics, and it also depends on the way you're spending your waking hours.

If you're not sure how many hours you need to feel refreshed, here's a useful thought experiment: Think back to a vacation when you didn't use an alarm – how many hours did you sleep? Chances are, the number of hours you slept without an alarm is consistent with the number of hours your body naturally needs.

Another way to find out how many hours you need is to do an experiment over a holiday or long weekend, and allow yourself to wake up whenever you want, without an alarm. Needless to say, if you're backed up on sleep, the first night of doing this won't tell you what you need to know because you're making up for lost sleep. But after 1 to 2 nights of sleeping without an alarm, start noticing how many hours you're getting. When you wake up naturally will reveal the ideal amount of time you need to sleep every night.

Once you've identified your ideal sleep duration, budget that amount of time, plus 20 minutes. So, for example, if you want 8 hours and you need to get up at 6:45am, you need to be asleep at 10:45pm. That means, to give yourself some time to fall asleep, aim to be under the covers 20 minutes earlier, or no later than 10:25pm.

Keep in mind – and this is important – if your ideal bedtime is 10:25 and you're currently in the habit of going to bed at 1:00am, it's not a good idea to try to do this all at once. Because your body is not used to being in bed so early, what will probably happen is you'll lay in bed feeling frustrated about not falling asleep.

Better to gradually shift your bedtime earlier, by moving your bedtime up 10 or 15 mins every day until you reach your goal. Trying to make too drastic a change all at once is rarely successful

Another important consideration to keep in mind when it comes to your ideal bedtime is that to the extent that you can, you want to honor that bedtime every night – even on weekends.

A mistake a lot of us make is that we stay up late on Friday and Saturday, and sleep later on Saturday and Sunday mornings. That leads to a phenomenon psychologists call “social jet lag”, because it's what happens when our social life throws off our bodily rhythms.

Sleeping-in on the weekends, after a late night with friends or binge watching TV, is what causes Sunday night insomnia. We can't fall asleep on Sunday night because our body is no longer ready for rest at the appropriate time.

And so, being consistent with going to bed and waking up at the same time is important because it trains your body to sleep when you want it to sleep.

Ok, so once you have an ideal bedtime, here's a second suggestion for optimizing your evening, and that is to conduct a nighttime audit.

I've posted a worksheet that goes along with this module to help you do this. Here's how it works:

- For one or two evenings, keep a log of everything that happens from the moment you arrive home until you go to bed.
- Don't change a thing
- Simply track where the time goes

The idea is to use this process to help you identify time sinks – activities you routinely find yourself doing over the course of your evening that are not consistent with how you want to be using your evening.

When people do this, what they often discover is that they don't need to eliminate activities they really enjoy that are keeping them up late (like watching Netflix). Instead, they can free up time by cutting out unproductive habits that happen earlier in the evening (like mindlessly scanning Facebook before eating dinner).

So, if right now the main reason you're not getting to bed on time is that you're watching TV too late, what you may find after doing this activity is that you can start watching TV earlier by eliminating a time-sink that happens around 7 or 8.

Now, I mentioned Facebook, and one distraction that eats up a lot of evening time is technology – and it's no wonder.

Late in the day is when you have less willpower to resist mindless distractions

One way to combat that impulse is to make it more difficult to access wasteful technology. You can do that by making your phone less visible when you get home. Where you keep your phone charger can have a big influence on your behavior. So, instead of keeping your charger in an area where you're frequently passing by, consider moving your charger to a location that's less prominent. This way, you're not tempted to pick up your phone each time you pass by.

You can also leave your phone in your car, put it in the pocket of your briefcase, or store it in a different room. The mistake many of us make is that we leave our smartphone on a kitchen counter. And that leads us to be drawn to it every time we pass. A smarter approach is to keep it out of view.

Now, if stowing your phone away is not an option, at the very least, consider turning on your phone's do not disturb function. You can even preprogram it, so it happens automatically. This way, your phone doesn't continuously lure you with dings and vibrations.

Now I mentioned having less willpower at the end of the day as one reason our phones suddenly become irresistible in the evening. But there's another reason, and it's that after a long day of work, we've been conditioned throughout the

day to expect new information. If you spend your entire day answering email, your brain learns to anticipate new inputs – constantly. And the good news is you can use this impulse to your advantage.

How? By replacing that cell phone on your kitchen counter with a book you want to read. This way, whenever you feel the urge to consume new information, you can indulge that desire in a positive way. You're still consuming new information – it's just information that's intentional and beneficial. You'd be amazed at how many books you can get through by simply tweaking where you place your books.

Now earlier, we talked about how the food we eat during the day impacts our sleep quality. And when it comes to dinner, as important as *what* we eat is *when* we eat it. From a sleep perspective, eating earlier is a wise approach. Your body isn't meant to digest while you sleep, so a big meal too close to bedtime will keep you up at night, impair your memory, and make you groggy the next day. High fat meals are especially difficult to digest – so avoid deep fried anything for dinner. And so, if you enjoy eating a big meal at the end of the day, be sure to start it earlier.

Another benefit to eating earlier is being able to drink more alcohol. If you enjoy drinking wine or beer with dinner, this part is for you. You're probably wondering: When is the latest I can drink?

Well, there are a lot of factors that go into determining how quickly alcohol is metabolized by the body. They include the type of drink, your weight, your gender and your alcohol tolerance. With that in mind, a safe rule of thumb is to cut off alcohol 3 hours before bed, plus one hour for every drink you consume beyond one. In other words, 3 hours for one drink; 4 hours for 2 drinks, 5 hours for 3 drinks, etc.

So, if you're planning on being asleep at 11pm, and you enjoy having 2 glasses of wine with dinner, drink no later than 7pm. Remember, alcohol will help you fall asleep, but the sleep you get will not be restorative. Better to get 6 hours of alcohol-free sleep than 8 hours of wine-induced sleep.

Now, if it's a little later than you'd planned, or you're really tempted to have a second or third drink, consider enjoying that beer or wine along with a glass of water. What that does is it reduces the potency of the alcohol and prevents you

from getting dehydrated. Diluting the alcohol in your system with water makes it easier for the body to metabolize and lessens its impact.

Before we leave the topic of meals, another important guideline is to avoid spicy food in the evening. The heat in spicy dishes is more than metaphorical – it actually raises our body temp. And, as we saw earlier, temperature is one of the signals our body uses to make us sleepy. The higher our body temperature, the more difficult it is for us to fall asleep. So if you like spicy foods – and personally, I do – try to save spicy meals for lunch, not dinner.

After your meal, do your best to stay away from liquids close to bedtime. As we age, many of us find ourselves visiting the bathroom more often at night. You can cut down on bathroom visits by cutting off fluids 2 hours before bed. Now, needless to say – if you're thirsty, drink – don't dehydrate yourself! But at the same time, avoid drinking late in the evening unless you need to.

Next, dim the lights in the evening. Remember, light tells our brain it's time to wake up, so keeping the lights in your home low can help. Some lights, of course, can't be dimmed – like the ones on our screens.

In those cases, there is a workaround: Get a pair of blue-light blocking glasses. Wearing these tinted glasses filters out the blue light emitted by screens. We have some recommended glasses you can get on Amazon listed on this page.

Another thing we've posted on the page are free extensions you can install on your desktop that will block out blue light automatically. They're really easy to install and completely free. You can also do the same on your smartphone so that you're not exposed to blue-light every time you pick up your phone.

Once you've adjusted the lights, it can also be very helpful to take a hot shower or bath. Ever notice how you yawn more often on a cold winter day? It's because lower temperatures make us feel sleepy, and you can leverage that insight to make yourself tired by taking a bath. How, you might be wondering, does warm water lower temperature?

Well, technically, it doesn't. In fact, lying in a warm bath artificially raises your temperature. But the moment you climb out, the temperature abruptly drops, which gradually makes you sleepy. Research tells us the ideal time for taking a warm, relaxing bath is about 90 minutes before bed. Keep in mind, you don't want a hot bath right before bed; your body needs to feel cool if you are to fall asleep.

The final recommendation I'm going to share in this video is to do something that may feel uncomfortable at first, but can make a dramatic difference in how long it takes you to fall asleep. And that suggestion is to disconnect from news sources 90 mins or more before bed. Now, you may be wondering –if I'm wearing blue-light blocking glasses, why can't I use my iPad to read the news or answer email?

It's because the problem with checking your phone before going to bed is not just blue light - it's because new information -- or novelty -- sends our brain into high alert. The reason this happens is because our brains evolved to pay close attention when encountering something unexpected.

In the past, new information was rare. Today, of course, social media and news websites bombard us with new information all the time. And yet, every time you consume new information, that elevates your alertness level, making it harder to fall asleep. This is why it's so critical to avoid news of any kind before bed -- no newspapers, no social media, and certainly no email.

Now, notice I didn't say eliminate devices – I said disconnect from news. Some people will tell you that you can't watch TV before sleep. There's no evidence to suggest that's true. So long as you're wearing your blue light dampening glasses and the content is not agitating, you will be OK. But make sure you're not watching anything upsetting, exciting, or arousing. So, in summary, Brady Bunch – OK but horror movies– not so much.

Ok, so now, you've got your lights turned down, you ate an early dinner, you stopped drinking hours ago, and you're ready for bed. What do you do next?

Well, before we get to that, let's talk about what it means to optimize your bedroom for sleep. I'm going to show you how to do it in our next video.

Part 4: How to design a “Sleep Cave”

In order to optimize your bedroom for sleep, you first need to appreciate a sleep insight that most people don't know: when it comes to feeling rejuvenated, the quality of your sleep is much more important than the quantity of hours you sleep. And if you think about it, you've experienced this first hand.

You know that there are nights when you've slept a full 9 hours only to wake up feeling tired and groggy.

And chances are, that was because of poor sleep quality. When our sleep is disrupted throughout the night, we're not able to get the deep sleep we need feel to rested.

To get restorative sleep, you need a bedroom that helps you stay asleep. And I like the analogy of a cave, because it's instructive. A cave is cool, quiet, and dark. You want your bedroom exactly the same way. Let's apply this thinking to different dimensions of your bedroom.

First, let's start with LIGHT. As you'll recall, light tells our brains that it's daytime, and so you want to banish light and embrace the darkness. An easy first step is to consider changing your bedroom lightbulbs. Within your bedroom, wherever possible, use dim lightbulbs – 40 watts is the recommended wattage.

Now, of course, not everyone wants their bedroom dim all the time, and if you prefer to keep a strong bulb for bright light for the mornings, an easy solution is to purchase a light dimmer. This way, you're getting dim light at night and bright light in the morning.

Along the same lines, it's important to identify other areas where you encounter bright light late in the evening, because again, anytime your body is exposed to bright light, it's going to react as if it's daytime.

One example of a bright light that many of us are exposed to in the evening is the light in our bathroom.

You can avoid that by keeping a nightlight in your bathroom – or even better, here's a fun gadget that I have found useful: it's a motion-activated toilet light. They sell these on Amazon very inexpensively. The way it works is that it turns on only when someone walks by the toilet – the bathroom remains completely dark otherwise. We've posted a couple of options on the course website.

Now, I mentioned the idea of using nightlights and, as it turns out, some nightlights are better for sleep than others. In particular, red nightlights are ideal. Studies have found that blue and green-tinted light tells our brain it's daytime, but darker colors like red and orange are less disruptive. So instead of using standard nightlights, opt for a red nightlight, which helps you stay sleepy if you happen to wake up.

Another important suggestion for reducing light in your bedroom is to cover up blinking lights. You know those pesky lights that flash throughout the night? Sometimes they're on your laptop, cable box, or TV. Well, you don't need to see them. You can cover them up with stickers called LightDims. Or, you can place scotch tape over the lights and darken them out by using a sharpie.

Along the same lines, you can keep your bedroom light-free by placing light-blocking strips on the door.

Here's an example – and you can find these at just about any hardware store.

Sleep masks are also worth trying. Personally, I love these because they prevent you from waking immediately when the sun rises. Now, they can take a little getting used to. If you're finding your sleep mask uncomfortable, I wouldn't immediately give up. There are variations of these available, and it may just be a matter of finding the design that's right for you. Personally, I use a larger one, with more cloth that wraps around the head. I like it because it covers the spaces above and below the eyes, so even if you peek, you won't see any light.

Finally, when it comes to minimizing the light entering your bedroom, one of the best things you can do (if you can afford to) is to install blackout blinds. These keep your bedroom very dark when the blinds are down – even during the day.

Now, you might be wondering, if I'm wearing a sleep mask, why would I need these? And the answer is because sunlight doesn't just enter our bodies through our eyes. Your skin has photoreceptors that influence your bodily rhythm. And so, if you're in a very bright room, even if your eyes are completely covered, you will have trouble sleeping well. This is why taking a nap on the beach or the pool isn't particularly restorative -- you need an environment that's completely dark.

OK, so we've covered light. Next, let's turn to SOUND. It goes without saying that you want to keep your bedroom quiet. Sound proof windows are certainly helpful but aren't always practical because of the cost, or if you live in an apartment, you may be stuck with what you have. And so, a nice alternative is to get a white noise machine to cover up disturbances. You can use the same kind that therapists leave outside their door, so that people in the waiting room can't hear what's said.

Many of us of have learned to tolerate noises like whirring refrigerators or ticking watches or a bus driving by – but we don't have to. A good white noise machine will block these sounds out. There are a variety of white noise apps available for smartphones, so you can try these out without buying a physical machine. Personally, I like having a physical white noise machine because I don't want my phone in my bedroom. But if you prefer using an app, that's a perfectly good option. We've listed a few white noise apps you can use on the course page.

Another point worth considering: if you like using a white noise machine, but the person sleeping next to you can't stand it, there are a couple of things you can do. One, is you can purchase a pillow with speakers, and play it through there. A second option is to get a sleep mask with speakers inside. A third option, which I use in addition to a physical sound machine, is ear plugs.

Now, I have to tell you: Of all the tips I'm sharing with you in today's module, this one was the most game changing for me. At first, I strongly resisted using ear plugs. I was worried that I'd insert it too far, and damage something, which, I discovered, I couldn't do even if I tried. Then, when I finally tried doing it, I couldn't get them to stay. Then one night, they went in without a problem. I realized that it was because I used face moisturizer before putting in my ear plugs, which provided lubrication. Once I added some lubrication, which you can do with moisturizer or the lubricants designed for hearing aids, I found that the ear plugs slide right in and work wonderfully.

On the resource page, we've linked to a video that takes you step by step through how to insert an ear plug. What it won't tell you is that you may need to use lubrication, which we also have a link to.

So we've talked about light and sound. Another component to building your night cave is controlling the TEMPERATURE. The research on this is clear -- we fall asleep significantly quicker in a cool room. As it turns out, the ideal bedroom temperature is around 68°F/20°C. Now, there's a little variation around that number – some people like it a little warmer in the winter and a little cooler in the summer, but in general, you want to keep it cool enough so that you need a blanket to be comfortable.

Whatever temperature you select, make sure to program the thermostat in your bedroom to adjust an hour before you get to bed, so that it's perfect when

you arrive. You don't want to get in bed and then wait an hour for it to get comfortable.

Keep in mind, the influence of temperature isn't limited to the number of degrees in your room – it's also influenced by pajamas you're wearing and the sheets you're using. I recommend staying away from materials like heavy wool or fleece that get you overheated. Simply using lighter bedding can have a dramatic impact on your sleep.

Now, we don't all sleep alone, of course. And if the person you sleep with prefers a different temperature, here are a few ideas. For one thing, try separate blankets in a shared bed. Alternatively, you can regulate your temperature by wearing socks to bed or taking off your shirt. For those who want to get really fancy, Amazon also sells bed cooling sheets – electronically controlling the temperature.

One of my favorite tips is keeping only one foot under the blanket – this makes the contrast of temperature more noticeable. Author Herman Melville once said: “In order to enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold.” I love that quote, and if you try sleeping with one foot under the blanket and the other foot exposed, you'll see exactly what he means.

So, you've optimized your sleep cave for light, sound, and temperature. Next, you want to ensure that your brain associates your bedroom with relaxation. That means, you want to keep it clean and uncluttered...clutter fosters stress and your bedroom needs to be a stress-free environment. So, look around, and see if you can identify some ways of removing clutter from your bedroom. That mean no piles of clothes waiting to be put in the laundry hamper, no receipts stacked up on your nightstand, no books you're hoping to read one day (that simply remind you of all the things you're not reading).

You should be able to enter your bedroom and see nothing that saps from a positive mood. That also means, avoid bringing anything into your bedroom related to work. No matter how much you enjoy what you do for a living, work is a source of stress and has no place in your sleep cave. One of the best tips I can offer you is to immediately remove any reminders of work from your bedroom. No paperwork, no computers, no work-related magazines. This is a stress-free environment that should remind you of nothing but relaxation.

To the extent that you find them pleasurable, high quality linens and pillows can be very helpful. The goal is for you to enjoy being in bed, and if that involves investing a bit more than you're used to in order to attract yourself to bed, that can be a worthwhile purchase. That said, I want to note that spending a lot of money isn't necessarily a requirement. In many cases, cost is unrelated to comfort.

What's right for you may not cost very much at all.

Another suggestion that's been clinically proven to foster relaxation is leveraging the power of scent. Research indicates that the smell of lavender helps people fall asleep more quickly. There's also research showing that jasmine improves the quality of people's sleep.

You can leverage scent in a couple of ways. The first is to get a bottle of essential oil and dab a few drops on your pillow. If you like that, you might consider getting an essential oil diffuser, which will spread that scent throughout your bedroom, so you smell it when you arrive in your bedroom and it's time for bed.

I use this essential oil diffuser, which comes with a timer. All you do is add water and a few drops of essential oil, and the diffuser shuts off on its own.

Ok, so now that we've optimized your bedroom, do you just lie down and close your eyes? Well, actually, no. Our minds don't work that way. We need to destress before sleep arrives. And how do you do that?

That's the focus of our next video. I'll see you there.

Part 5: Build Your Sleep Runway

In this video, we're going to look at how to use the last hour of your day to unwind. The last 30-60 minutes before bed is your sleep runway, and it's immensely important to the quality of your sleep.

During that time, your goal is to do one thing and one thing only: And that's help yourself relax.

One way to do that reliably is to craft a bedtime ritual. If you're a parent, you know that one of the first things you're taught when it comes to helping your child fall asleep is to create a bedtime ritual. By repeating the same series of associations night after night, you train the brain to expect a time for rest. And it works – not just for children, but for adults too.

The trick is predictability and consistency – to follow the same series of steps every night, minimizing variation, even on weekends. The more predictable and consistent your behaviors are in the hours before bed, the easier it is for your mind to relax.

So what goes into creating an effective routine? Well, the first step is finding a way to ensure that it starts automatically every night, without you having to think about it. And here, I recommend setting an alarm that prompts you to start the process.

Many of us rely on alarms to wake up in the morning. You can do the same thing to remind yourself to start your bedtime routine an hour before you want to be in bed. Personally, I set my Fitbit to vibrate silently at 10:30, reminding me to turn off the TV and head upstairs. And you don't need a Fitbit - iPhone now has a bedtime reminder feature that you can program.

Now, remember, you don't want the alarm reminding you to go to bed. You want the alarm reminding you to start your bedtime routine – which as you're about to see, should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

So, once your alarm rings, what do you do? Well, there are 2 keys to creating a successful bedtime routine.

Here's the first: you want to start off your bedtime routine with an activity or a ritual that is immediately rewarding. The reason for this is unless your bedtime routine kicks off with something enjoyable, you will find yourself putting it off. Late in the day is when our self-control is at its lowest, and so we find ourselves putting off anything that requires effort, including forcing ourselves to go to bed. But when the bedtime routine includes activities we look forward to doing, starting isn't hard at all. So, after your alarm reminds you to wind down, start your routine with something enjoyable and calming.

In a moment, I'm going to give you some activities you can use to get your brain in a relaxed mindset. Any of these can work, and it's really a matter of personal preference. In general, the most important thing is to avoid new and stimulating information, and instead, direct your attention to something you find relaxing.

One idea is to start the process by lighting a candle. This lowers the light and creates a calm mood. You can turn on your essential oil diffuser. Some people enjoy putting on classical music or jazz. It's all a matter of what you find rewarding.

Once you've set the right mood, you want to select a soothing task before bed. One option is to read.

Research indicates that reading for as little as 6 minutes lowers our heartrate, eases muscle tension, and reduces stress by as much as 60%.

Now, of course, that doesn't work for reading just any topic. For example, if you're reading your bank statement or a magazine related to work, that's probably not going to help you fall asleep. Better to read something that helps you disengage and relax. Think poetry, fiction, or a graphic novel.

Another option is stretching. Doing a series of relaxing, low-impact exercises like yoga or gentle stretching in the evening can help promote sleep. Just be sure not to do anything that elevates your heartrate. The key is to draw your awareness to your muscles and feel them getting tired.

Another way of relaxing the body is by being deliberate about your breath. When we're relaxed, our breathing slows. And researchers have found that that relationship is bidirectional. When we slow our breath, our body relaxes.

There are a number of useful apps, including Calm (which we've linked to on the course page), that provide breathing exercises -- just remember to use your blue light blocking glasses. They all revolve around the general principal of breathing out for longer than you breathe in. You can practice this app-free by breathing in to a count of 3, and breathing out to a count of 6. LET'S TRY IT NOW...see how relaxing that feels? Doing 10 of those before sleep can really help.

There's also research showing that meditating before bed can help you fall asleep, by helping you relax.

I've listed a few apps worth trying on the course page, some of which have a meditation specifically designed for the hours before going to sleep. Keep in mind, meditation isn't always relaxing the first time you do it. It can take a dozen or so times before you start experiencing the full benefits. Don't get frustrated if you don't find it immediately relaxing, and don't give up on it too quickly. The research on the benefits of meditation is clear -- for people who

meditate regularly, stress does go down and sleep does improve. It might just take a little bit of practice.

Over time, doing these bedtime activities again and again, right before going to bed will create associations in your mind, and after a while, simply doing them will make you sleepy. Now remember, in order for these activities to facilitate sleep, you can only do them just before going to bed. So, if you turn on your diffuser or do your stretching first thing in the morning, the association to sleep will disappear. The key is to develop a routine that you only use right before sleep.

Whichever activities you choose to incorporate into your bedtime routine, do your best to steer clear of negativity at all costs. Your final hour should be positive and light. That means you must resist checking the news, visiting your bank account, or discussing sensitive matters with your spouse. If the person you live with brings up a sensitive subject before bed, suggest that you pick up the discussion sometime the next day. Not only will this help you sleep better, it will likely lead to a more productive discussion, when both of you have more energy.

Another common source of negativity that people often allow into their bedroom involves programming their alarm clock right before they get into bed. By now, you can probably guess why this is a terrible idea. You do not want to introduce time pressures because that's a source of anxiety.

If the last thing you think about before hopping into bed is how late it is and how, if you don't fall asleep, tomorrow will be a disaster, that is not exactly setting yourself up for success. A better approach is to set your morning alarm when you wake up, first thing in the morning, or sometime during the day.

Ok, next. Before you lie down, there are 2 lists worth writing to declutter your mind. The first is something I call a Tomorrow List. A Tomorrow List gets you focused on your plans for the following day. In particular, it involves writing down a few accomplishments that you're hoping to achieve tomorrow, that would make tomorrow a great day.

Using a notepad, simply jot down 3-5 positive outcomes that would make tomorrow a success. Avoid getting into too much detail. So, for example, you can write down things like "Draft memo" or "Get car washed", without going into the mechanics of how exactly you'll get it done. Then, tear off the sheet

and flip it over, leaving the notepad near your bed, so you can quickly capture ideas that pop up as you're going to sleep.

This recommendation surprises a lot of people who assume that the last thing we should be thinking about before going to bed is work. But in fact, this is where having research is so important. As it turns out, we now have studies that indicate that writing down our goals – even when they are related to work – helps us relax and declutters our mind. And the more we declutter our mind, the less there is for us to worry about when we try to fall asleep.

The key is to focus on solutions. You're not ruminating on your worries – you're writing down what you're going to achieve to make tomorrow a great day. Being solutions-focused helps us feel calm and in control.

The other advantage to doing this exercise late in the day is the power of distance. After a period of time away from work, we're much better at distinguishing tasks that merely feel urgent from those that are genuinely important. Psychological distance helps us focus on what really matters. If you're like most people, chances are, you are going to be much better at identifying your priorities a few hours removed from work, than when you're smack in the thick of it.

During our next class -- on morning routines – we'll talk about what you do with this list when you arrive at work. Hold on to this list. Not only will it help you get ideas out of your head, it's actually going to give you a headstart the following day.

And that brings us to the second exercise you want to do to declutter your mind before lying down, and that is to write a few lines in a daily journal. Now, a lot of people bristle at the idea of keeping a journal, and I want to urge you to withhold judgment for a just a little bit and listen to why I think it's worth trying.

First let me say that what you write in your journal is entirely up to you, and I'll give you a few ideas in a moment. The key is to write a few sentences about the events that you experienced that day. Taking a moment to actively reflect on our day and put our experience into words gives you a sense of control and makes it easier to quiet our thoughts.

Here's why: Writing about your day forces you to take a step back and view your experience more objectively. It forces you to craft a narrative around what happened, which creates a sense of ownership and control. That can be incredibly valuable in a world in which we are inundated with information, often rushing from crisis to crisis.

A journal I highly recommend getting is the 5 year memory book, which we've linked to on the course page. Each day, you only have a few lines to write on. So there's no pressure to write a lot, even if you wanted to. And then, after a year, something magical happens. You get to read about what you were doing on this day, one year ago. I started doing this about 2 years ago and I've had an unexpected bonus. I've noticed that on many days, I was stuck on a problem that at the time, seemed insurmountable. But now, a year later, I know that I ended up figuring out what to do. Having a physical record to remind you of all of the difficulties you have overcome is invaluable. So now, when something bad happens, I'm no longer intimidated. I have a daily reminder that I've overcome lots of challenges and I'll be able to do it again. That builds resilience – and again, fosters calm, which helps us sleep.

The other benefit of writing in a 5 year diary is that I often get to read about something funny my kids did or said a year ago, and as a result, on most nights I go to bed with a smile on my face. Today, I can't imagine not having one of these.

From my perspective, living without a journal is like painting a portrait all day and not bothering to step back and examine what you've made. If you're not reflecting on your day, you're not learning or improving how you live.

Ok, so now you've completed your nighttime routine, you're lying down in bed and you're ready to fall asleep. Now what? Well, as it turns out, we have evidence-based advice on what to do here as well. It comes to us from research at the University of California.

In one experiment, researchers invited a group of people who reported having a hard time falling asleep and divided them into 3 groups. Group 1 was not given any instructions. Group 2 was told to try and forget their worries. Group 3 was asked to think pleasant thoughts. Then, the researchers timed how long it took each group to fall asleep.

Here's what they found: The group not given any instructions took over an hour to fall asleep. The group told to try and forget their worries fell asleep in about 40 minutes. And the group asked to think pleasant thoughts fell asleep in by far the shortest amount of time: 20 minutes.

Now, I want to highlight three takeaways we can learn from this study. The first is that focused thinking can be beneficial. We often assume that we should lie in bed and do our best not to think of anything until sleep arrives. That turns out to be bad advice.

The second takeaway is that you should focus your thinking in a very specific way: on something positive

For example, thinking about a good movie, an upcoming vacation, or that relaxing picnic you had over the summer with friends can all be very helpful.

And there's a third takeaway as well: Think in images. The brain uses the visual cortex both when we are imagining and when we are dreaming. Simply by imagining, you are, in effect, emulating how the brain functions during dreams. And so, regardless of the specific positive event you are thinking about, you want to do so in a way that helps you focus on the visual elements.

You can do that by focusing on the details. Try to imagine yourself being there. What colors do you see?

What objects are in your surroundings? What positive feelings does being there bring about? The more engrossed you become in the situation, the more quickly you'll become relaxed.

Part 6: What to do when you can't fall asleep

The final video this week is on what to do when you can't fall asleep. Now, if you're like most people, you are all too familiar with the experience of lying in bed, staring up at the ceiling, wanting more than anything to fall asleep, but not being able to shut off your mind. And the later it gets, the worse your mood becomes.

So, what do you do?

Let me briefly summarize the research with 4 Don'ts and a Do - 4 things you may be doing that you should stop, and 1 thing you should do instead.

The first thing you should not do when you're having trouble falling asleep is look at the clock. This is true both for when you're having trouble falling asleep at the beginning of the night, or if you've woken up midway through. Any device that tells you the time is to be strictly avoided.

Here's why. Psychologically, there's a lot more going on when you look at a clock than simply reading a number. That's because seeing that number prompts you to do math. You're immediately tempted to run through mental calculations of the number of hours you have left. And that activates the very mental apparatus you're trying to shut down with your bedtime routine. So looking at the clock is a bad idea. You can avoid it by turning your clock away from your bed, or covering it up with fabric.

The second thing you shouldn't do is count sheep. This idea – which many of us have been taught either by our parents, or from popular culture – has a very interesting backstory. It originated from a practice that sheep herders would use when they couldn't fall asleep. Typically, the reason sheep herders couldn't fall asleep is because they were worried about whether they had lost any sheep over the course of the day. And so, when sheep herders were worried, they would count sheep at night to calm their nerves.

Now, unless you're a sheep herder, counting sheep is not just irrelevant – it can actually interfere with your ability to fall asleep, because counting is a mental process that requires concentration. Instead of math, a better approach is to focus on your gratitudes – things you're grateful for. Think about your kids, your spouse, your upcoming vacation in the Caribbean. This approach is more likely to help you relax than performing mental calculations.

The third thing you shouldn't do is try to fall asleep. No matter how badly you want to fall asleep, willing yourself to do so simply doesn't work. In fact, it will backfire and keep you up. So what should you do instead? Well, research indicates you'd actually be better off trying to stay awake.

Sleep researchers at the University of Glasgow tested this out. In one of their lab experiments they found that instructing people to stay awake for as long as they can actually leads them to fall asleep faster than telling people to fall asleep as quickly as possible.

Why? Because when you are actively trying to fall asleep, part of what you're doing is monitoring whether or not you're awake. And that process of self-

monitoring and the vigilance it demands contributes to keeping you alert. And so, ironically, trying to fall asleep actually focuses our attention on the fact that we're awake. And that awareness is frustrating, and prevents us from relaxing long enough to fall asleep.

And that brings us to our final don't, which is don't stay in bed. The moment you sense yourself getting frustrated with how long it's taking you to fall asleep, that's when you should pick yourself up and leave your bedroom.

You need to recalibrate your mindset by doing something positive and calming. Read a book or a magazine that is pleasant and relaxing. If you're hungry, eat something light. Bananas have been shown to help people sleep. You can also eat toast, or a yogurt. Eating induces drowsiness and releases neurotransmitters in the brain that help us relax. Just be sure to steer clear of anything heavy or demanding on your digestive system.

Whatever you do after you leave the bedroom— avoid the internet. Once you pick up your iPhone, your chances of feeling tired shrink significantly.

And finally, here's the one DO: Do shift your thinking. Unfortunately, what really prevents people from falling asleep when they're tired is the frustration and anxiety of not falling asleep. Here, the research is enlightening. We actually tend to get more sleep than we realize. I

n one study, researchers found that people who have a hard time sleeping underestimated how much sleep they were getting by over 100%. 100%! In other words, they thought they were getting 3 hours a night when in reality they were getting about 6.5. Now, how, you might wonder, can people possibly underestimate their sleep by such a large margin? Simple. Because people who have a hard time sleeping, dream that they can't fall asleep.

Another point worth considering is that we often perform much better than we assume when we're tired. Most of the research we've reviewed applies when people suffer from prolonged sleep deprivation. And sure, not getting enough sleep in the short term can be unpleasant, but overall we tend to handle ourselves much better than we anticipate. So, if you're having trouble falling asleep and you're worried about what it means for your performance the next day, consider how you have fared in the past – chances are you did ok.

It also helps to recognize that what you're experiencing is perfectly normal: While television shows might give us the impression that people fall asleep right away, the truth is most people struggle with falling asleep at least 2 to 3 times a week. So keep this in mind: Just relaxing and lying in bed is good for you, even if you're not asleep.

And that brings us to the close of our first module. We covered a lot! You now know the science behind getting high quality sleep, and why it's so critical to your success. You have a variety of steps you can take, throughout the day and the evening, to set yourself up for a restorative night of rest. And you know exactly what you should do before going to bed to not only calm your mind but also to give you a headstart tomorrow.

If you scroll down on this page, you'll find exercises that will help you apply the strategies. You'll also find recommended apps, tools, and supplemental readings for this lesson.

In our next class, we'll look at starting your morning off right. You'll learn how to destress your morning, and build in practices that help you arrive at work with both focus and poise.

We'll also look at the science of breakfast, and what we should eat to set ourselves up for success. And we'll examine how to use that Tomorrow List I suggested writing every evening, and use it to prioritize the day ahead.

I'll see you in the next module!