

# How Do You Sleep?

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## Collected Posts On Slumber



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by Jonathan FitzGordon

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**Other books in this series:**

Psoas Release Party!

Sciatica/Piriformis Syndrome

The Spine: An Introduction To The Central Channel

The Exercises of CoreWalking

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## Introduction

Teaching people to walk as a method to relieve lower back, and other painful conditions, ultimately led me to understand how sleeping can create, foster and even exacerbate the very same things we cope with while we are awake. This realization took some time but it began in the simplest of ways.

What the CoreWalking Program teaches is fairly basic—most people walk and stand in a way that doesn't really serve them well. If you don't suffer pain it is easy to get away with negative patterns even if they aren't ultimately good for you. It is also fairly easy to change those patterns to create a far better quality of life for yourself.

As the program developed, there were numerous people who were doing everything I asked of them and yet stubborn issues — that I expected to subside — stuck around long after I thought they should have been alleviated.

This is when, on a lark, as with so many things I do, I began asking people to show me the way that they slept. Recurring patterns began to show themselves and changing those patterns often became the final piece in a long and often frustrating puzzle.

Posts on sleeping began appearing about a year into the blog and, as I collated this collection, I was surprised

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at just how much I had written on the subject. While certain themes consistently show themselves through many of the posts, each and every one has its own specific topic that I touch upon.

The posts are presented chronologically without much revision and the reader will be able to follow my own learning curve as I have delved into this mysterious subject.

Everyone sleeps. There are certain common elements to sleep that everyone shares regardless of how long or how well we sleep. As we sleep our nervous system gets a much needed break after hours of wakefulness. Most of the body's muscles relax, and the thinking brain is essentially shut down.

But at the same time, things are happening behind closed eyes that we are not aware of and are not necessarily recordable. Dream states and deep sleep happen without much mindfulness once we wake up.

These are things beyond our control, but we have found that what we can control — how we go to sleep, the position that we sleep in, the environment we sleep in — can all help to create a happier and healthier waking state, providing untold benefits. With that in mind, enjoy the first compilation of our blog posts... *How Do You Sleep?*

# How Do You Sleep?

Posted on October 14, 2011



You probably wouldn't believe how many aches pains and injuries stem from our sleeping positions. Very often when I am at my wits end when dealing with a client with mystery pain, I ask to see the position that they sleep in and all becomes clear.

Like everything there a correct or best way to sleep. That would be on your back, though even that can be a problem with someone who has poor tone in the inner thighs (which unfortunately is a majority of humans walking the planet). Sleeping on your stomach is the biggest no-no. Sleeping on the stomach compresses the lumbar spine and the curve of the lumbar spine might be our most important feature.

Likewise, sleeping on your side with one knee hiked up over the pelvis is also a classically poor way to sleep. This was my favored position for the first forty years of life and my lower back was never happy about it even though I didn't realize it.

## Relax your Shoulders

Posted on November 17, 2011

When I wake up every morning I sit at the edge of my bed trying to let the effects of the night's sleep wash out of my body. Over the course of each evening my shoulders head and neck build up a great deal of tension that I seem to have no control over.



Who would think that your sleep position could cause you suffering? Aches and pains are a natural part of life—but from sleeping? The thing about aches and pains is that we don't always know where they come from. Sometimes a small crick in the neck shows up and for the next few months turning your head to the right is less easy than it previously was. Or some strange pain occurs in the outside of the foot that won't seem to go away, and then it does.

This is the nature of living and all too often we allow these small discomforts to linger for too long—these are all feelings that should be examined for their origin. I describe what I do as being a detective trying to figure out why someone has a particular pattern causing them pain and then I do my best to find the root of the pattern/pain connection in search of relief.



A couple of days ago in class I asked everyone to lie down on their mat and show me the position they sleep in. About half were in shapes that were almost guaranteed to cause them pain over the long run. Positions such as sleeping on the stomach, on the side with one knee hiked up, and some others.

One of my own sleep issues is what to do with my hands and arms. I used to sleep on my side with both hands tucked in between two pillows under my head. As a result I was always waking up with numbness in my left shoulder. Before long I figured out that I since I was sleeping on my right side my left shoulder was lifting up to my ear and over time causing a good deal of misery. It took a while but I eventually got the top arm to lower. Now I keep it wedged between my legs.

This helped a lot but left me with the other arm to deal with and I haven't really figured anything out about what to do with it while I sleep. So every morning when I wake up, the first thing that I usually do is sit on the side of the bed and let my shoulders relax. I literally let them drape down towards the floor as my head lengthens up to the ceiling from the back of the neck.

As I do this I can feel hours of sleeping tension begin to subside. Life is what it is; a series of dilemma's and decisions that are endlessly placed before us. How you sleep is one of life's more serious dilemmas and one well worth exploring to find positive solutions.

## Pillow Between the Thighs

Posted on December 7, 2011



If you have been reading this blog you know that I am very interested/obsessed with sleeping positions. While sleep might not cause injuries (though it might), it can definitely exacerbate them as the sleeping body can happily give in to misalignments and take on shapes that while comfortable, only increase our problems.

A classic example is sleeping on your side with one knee hiked up towards your chest. This accommodates the tight psoas on the hiked knee side but it also torques the pelvis for the duration of your sleep. No good can come from that.

That was me about five years ago. Since that time I have moved my knees together and actually straightened my legs, most of the way, while I sleep. I also have been sleeping with a pillow between my thighs for the past couple of years simply because it is recommended by a lot of people. Hey, I'm easy.

But lately I have been noticing that my left knee feels a bit tight when I wake up. The tightness dissipates fairly quickly but it is there every morning

upon waking. In the back of my mind I have always been a little skeptical of the pillow between the legs as separating the legs throws off the natural alignment of the skeleton. Anatomical neutral when standing has the knees right next to each so the shin bones can move straight down to the feet in a parallel position.

Putting a pillow between your thighs separates the legs and I am wondering if it separates them too much. The IT band on the outer thigh tends towards tightness in a great many people. If that is the case the pillow between the legs is a gift to that tightness because it allows the tight IT band to shorten, and this might not be a good thing. It is just like accommodating the tight psoas with one knee higher than the other. It might actually make sleeping easier but can also increase its tightness.

I'm not sure. It has been two nights without a pillow and I'd like to think my knee feels different but I won't know for a couple of weeks. Check out the way you sleep and how you feel when you wake up. Changing your sleep position, if necessary, is one of the best ways to help your body.

## Ageing Gracefully

Posted on January 23, 2012

Ageing gracefully is the main theme of my adult life. I had a session with a healer recently who said that we are alive for two reasons- to wake up/or not, and die. Waking up spiritually interests me but might be above my pay grade. I don't get the sense that I have a date with enlightenment in my future. But working on dying, and the journey towards dying seems to be worth some effort.

What does it mean to age gracefully? I'm sure the phrase would have different connotations for different people but I use it in both the emotional and physical context. I was lucky enough to have my first child when I was 42. I shudder to think how my 25 year old self might have parented. The amount of patience and restraint required for the job is in short supply at 48 and would have been nonexistent in my twenties.

While I have mellowed emotionally I have also noticed, to put it kindly, a mellowing of my physical body. I used to make fun of an older friend who needed reading glasses and he would say, "just wait till you turn forty."

It was as if some internal clock in my eyes flicked a switch and my 40th birthday found me in an optometrist's office getting fitted for reading glasses of

my own. The nature of the body is to deteriorate. We are dying from the minute we are born- “every day a little death”, to quote Stephen Sondheim.

I read somewhere recently that the body is not designed to make it past 68; everything after that is gravy. So what can we do to stave off the impending decrepitude?

There are three essential factors:

- How you eat.
- How you sleep.
- How you exercise.

They are all equally important in no particular order. Most everyone knows these simple facts yet many of us disregard one if not all of them.

For me personally,

- I like sugar too much.
- I don't get enough sleep (did I mention my children?)
- I exercise but it is a constant battle to get out of the chair and onto the mat.

Life is an adventure and I don't want to miss out on the fun. I also want to live to 100. It is an enduring challenge.

## To Sleep, Perchance to Dream

Posted on August 20, 2012

I haven't written about sleeping, one of my favorite topics, in a while — seven months to be exact. As infants and children we ideally spend half of the day sleeping



and as adults it is good to spend a third of the day lost in slumber. I don't think I have slept eight hours in a night in the last thirty years but it is a fantasy I aspire to.

It is a no brainer for people to understand how harmful it can be to spend too much time at a desk with bad posture. The same logic should be applied to sleeping since we do it for a sustained period of time each day in relatively the same position. A great many people suffer from lower back pain simply because of the way that they sleep.

There aren't that many sleep positions—but some are much better than others. Classically, and in the past I have always agreed with this, sleeping on the back in the best way to sleep. Over the past year I have started to change my tune in certain cases. My job boils down to looking at bodies and I look at a lot of them. Savasana, or corpse pose in yoga, which we

do at the end of each yoga class is one of my favorite opportunities for getting to know the bodies of the students I am working with. A relaxed body doesn't lie and the way legs and feet flow out of the hip sockets tells you a great deal about the balance and tone of the leg muscles.

The variations that I see when people are lying down are numerous. Ideally the feet are about six inches apart and the feet are turned out at about a forty-five degree angle. That is rarely the case. Often someone has one foot at forty-five degrees and the other is completely turned open to the floor. Just as often, both feet are completely, or almost completely, flopped open. I have come to decide that these people are not served by sleeping on their backs because it will only reinforce negative patterns.

The most compelling argument about the need for adequate core tone in the body can be made in regards to sleeping. The ideal leg position that has the feet hanging at forty five degrees would be due to a balanced musculature of the inner and outer leg.

No one should sleep on the stomach—that I haven't changed my mind about. Sleeping on the stomach pushes against the front of the lower spine, compressing the all-important curve of the lumbar spine. No good can come from that. Just as bad is sleeping on our side

with one knee hiked up higher than the other knee. Any discrepancy in the alignment of the knees can lead to trouble because when the knees are not lined up the hip bones and sacrum are also displaced.

The ideal way to sleep, from my perspective, is on your side with the legs almost straight and the knees in line. I put a thin pillow between my thighs so the bones of my knees don't knock. I got rid of the pillow for a while but it made its way back in of late.

Later this week I will post about the difficulty I am having with sleeping on my side. Stay tuned.



# Inner and Outer Thigh Imbalance

Posted on September 3, 2012



A couple of weeks ago, in a post about sleep positions, I mentioned an issue I have been having with sleeping on my side. It

takes a particularly obsessive brain to lie in bed and think about what all the different parts of the body are doing as sleep is invited to take over. But that's what I do pretty much every night as I lay in the dark.

The latest food for thought has been the imbalance between my inner and outer thighs. I am left handed and everything on my left side is stronger than my right side. This imbalance manifests most clearly in the inner and outer thighs of the right leg. I have a habitual turnout of my right foot that adds to this issue—the outer thigh is simply asked to do more than the inner thigh on the right side.

You can tell a great deal about someone's body when they lay flat on the floor with nothing underneath. Looking at the supine person's feet will give an inkling of the tone that runs through the entire body. Ideally the feet should fall open at forty five degrees and the inner and outer foot should be on the same plane or close. If the outer thigh is stronger than the inner thigh

we tend to see the outer foot move forward much further than the inner foot.

My body much prefers sleeping on the right side. I make sure to switch in the course of the night but I probably spend eighty percent of my time on the right side. When I sleep on the left side my feet are softly flexed and evenly balanced. When I lie on my right side, the right foot, which is on the bottom, turns and lays more on the top of the foot than on the side of the foot. Over the course of six hours this can add up to trouble and I am not sure what the solution is.

My current mattress has persevered through four moves and my wife's two pregnancies and I think it might be time for a change. I don't know if the mattresses that mold to your body would allow me to fix my foot in a position that I choose but I think it is worth exploring. I'll keep you posted.

# Sleep Deprivation

Posted on September 24, 2012



There was a time in my life when I would lay my head on a pillow at midnight and wake up six hours later refreshed and happy, without a care in the world. At least that is the memory and illusion that I choose to think back on. Then I had kids. But life is about change and I consider myself to be extremely adaptable so I have embraced my new life often feeling like deep sleep is a thing of the past.

I love sleep like few other things. I love my bed, my sheets, my many pillows and my eye mask. Even though I don't sleep all that much I still spend more time in my bed than any other place. Between six to seven hours of every day is spent in bed—sometimes less but never more. I have written a number of times about how sleep positions can have a profound effect on our bodies but the number of hours that we sleep and the quality of those hours is profoundly important for our health.

The range of issues that have been linked to sleep deprivation in studies covers such goodies as type two diabetes, heart disease, mental illness, obesity, work performance, seizures and the big one— mortality.

And this is not a complete list.

I have two children. My daughter Ida is seven and began sleeping through the night as soon as she stopped nursing. Once she is asleep I could blast a symphony in her ear and she would not wake up. Given the opportunity she happily sleeps from eight pm to eight am. My son Reggie on the other hand never sleeps through the night. He is often up once or twice and is usually in our bed before the night is halfway done. I try to be up early enough to get some work done before the rest of the family rises but if I make even the slightest noise he is awake with me.

I believe that their different sleep patterns have a profound effect on their personalities. It isn't that my son is unhappy but he definitely gets cranky far more easily and his crankiness often lasts longer. Food and sleep are the big definers in children's moods and to me it seems clear that my sons sleep or lack thereof has a unique influence on his behavior.

Among other things, we are designed to recharge when we sleep. The down time of sleeping allows our brains to process and compartmentalize the events of the previous day. There are also chemicals in the body called neurotransmitters which facilitate the body's communications systems. Studies have shown that lack of sleep causes imbalances in the body's

neurotransmitters which can affect our emotional being as well as our functional being.

In the context of exercise and injury, exhaustion very often leads to injury and injury very often leads to limited sleep. I can personally attest to injuries occurring because I kept working out even though I was tired and should have stopped. Anyone who has thrown out their back or suffered any acute injury will know the feeling of being woken in up in the middle of the night by a surge or spasm of pain.

One of the studies I looked at that involved more than 82,000 nurses and found an increased risk of death among those who slept less than six hours a night. We are supposed to get eight hours a night but try as I might I find it hard to sleep more than six hours at a time. I have had ample opportunities to sleep more but it never happens. But I feel that six hours is right for me and I know that when I sleep less my day will not go as well as it could.

The good news is we are able to catch up on the sleep we have lost. It means napping or getting some long nights in but it can be done and it seems to be that it would be worth the effort. The point of this post is to implore everyone to try and sleep a little bit more. I often say when teaching yoga that the things we can get away with in our twenties, thirties and forties might well catch up to us in our sixties, seventies, and eighties. It appears that the same maxim holds true for sleeping.

## The Sleep of the Dead: Eye Masks

Posted on October 10, 2012

I began wearing an eye mask in 1990 during a transient time in my life. In the months before I moved into the first apartment of my own I spent some time living the life of a transient sleeping on friends couches. Sleeping in different rooms each week and sometimes each night left me unable to control the amount of light I had to contend with. At the time I was something of a night creature often staying awake until four in the morning so I needed some way to remain in the dark. Enter the eye mask.



The brand doesn't matter all that much though I have been enjoying a CVS model of late. The masks don't last forever because the elastic always weakens so I have had to replace my fair share of eye masks over time. I currently have a drawer with about five of them. There is also one lurking in both my luggage and my backpack. You never know when you might need such a sleep aid.

The odds are that you can improve the quality of the sleep you get on a nightly basis. Our sleep is affected by so many things. The next thing I will write about is electronics and how they affect us if we are plugged into them right before going to bed.

Melatonin is the chemical of sleeping. Its production causes drowsiness and prepares the body for sleep. As your eyes begin to register that the light of day is changing, the brain does its thing and starts to produce melatonin that will help you fall asleep. Any light inhibits the production of melatonin which controls your sleep cycles.

Put on a mask, shut out the light, and you will likely improve the quality of your sleep.

Since light affects how much melatonin your body produces the shorter days of the winter months are likely to produce less melatonin in the body. Some researchers see a correlation between this and seasonal affective disorder which plagues so many people. Melatonin levels also lower with age which might explain why people sleep less as they age.

I continue to write about sleeping and how important I think it is for good health and successful ageing. Sleep deprivation as well as sleeping in the wrong positions can have far ranging effects on the body and mind. The quality of the rest you get while sleeping is equally important.

An eye mask can shut out the light from your world for a few hours each night and that can be incredibly beneficial to your body and soul. I highly recommend giving one a try.

# Electronics and Sleep

Posted on October 22, 2012



It is easy to take sleep for granted. Sleeping, similar to walking, is something that we can do without

paying much attention to how it is accomplished. There are numerous activities that fall into the unconscious category and we fail to contemplate their execution—walking, sleeping, breathing and sitting being the most common.

When I wanted to learn about sleep deprivation I went online and found study after study to check out. Looking for the same sort of information about the effects of electronic equipment on sleep patterns I found almost fifty articles but they were all written about the same annual survey (not a study) released each year by the National Sleep Foundation. I eventually came across a couple of studies that had similar findings.

What they found was not good. A large majority of people are plugged into their electronics day and night and certain of our electronic toys emit light that can effect chemical production in the brain.

Serotonin and melatonin are neurotransmitters



responsible for regulating the mood and health of the body and mind. Positive serotonin levels contribute to feelings of well-being and wakefulness, whereas melatonin regulates our sleep cycles. Irregularities in serotonin and melatonin production can wreak havoc on the body.

Many electronic gadgets like computers and ipads emit a blue light (ereaders don't necessarily emit this same light) that suggest the same colors as daylight and can inhibit melatonin production. The kicker is that electronic gadgets in the evening also seem to inhibit serotonin production during the day for the double whammy of poor sleep and sluggish consciousness.

I came late to the modern age. I did not get a computer till I was thirty-two and I became internet obsessed around thirty-seven or thirty-eight (I trace it to the 2000 election). I used to sleep very well and for a long time I have blamed the fact that I no longer sleep like a rock on my kids; but I might just have to reassess that theory.

The recommendation from the survey was to avoid electronic media for an hour before bed. I found one article about a guy from Oakland, California who went so far as to unplug every appliance in his house after dark, including his refrigerator and found that he slept like a baby and was always in a great mood.

And he claimed that friends that had no idea about his experiment, commented on his changed attitude.

I am thinking about trying to chill for an hour before bed but the nature of my life is such that last night at midnight found me on the couch watching yesterday's football game (New York Giants) on tape. It was a crazy game with Eli Manning pulling off his usual heroics in the last minute. Everything always comes with a choice—sleep well or see an exciting football game? Last night was a no brainer but I will try again tonight.

## What to do About Numbness in My Arms From Sleeping?

Posted on December 6, 2012



Numb fingers, stressed out shoulders, a tight neck. These are the issues I deal with each and every morning when I wake up and it drives me crazy. These problems also interrupt my sleep which frustrate me to no end. I'll wake up to a numb tingling in my hand or fingers and have to roll over to change that environment. So I must admit, with a heavy heart, that I have no idea about what to do about numbness in my arms while sleeping.

One of my hands has been trained to stay between my thighs wedged in to keep it stationary. This was no small feat as I used to sleep with both hands under the side of my head. Changing that pattern took a long time and only solved one of my issues. My hand that is now between my thighs used to hike its shoulder up in order for that hand to be under my cheek; this persistent raising of the shoulder left the muscles of neck miserable for minutes upon waking.

So one hand is taken care of but what about the other one? I can't sleep on my back no matter how hard

I try and though I have tried to lie on my side without putting one of my hands under my cheek it feels very awkward and uncomfortable. What am I to do?

The sad answer so far is—I don't know. And this is very disconcerting to me. I go sleep each night with the intention of solving the riddle of my numb extremities and wake up a pins and needle ridden failure. It is a good thing that failure is my friend or I would be a broken mess.

My next step is going to be a bigger bed (my son still climbs into my bed and shoves me around) and a new mattress. I have never tried the memory foam mattresses and I wonder if that would provide an answer to my problems.

## Electronics and Sleeping Revisited: F.Lux

Posted on January 24, 2013



Sleep used to come easily and deeply for me. Six or seven solid hours were always enough and my eyes would pop open with energy for the start of a new day. My first computer showed up on the scene when I was thirty two and my first child ten years later. The quality of my sleep has been unstable ever since and I wrote a post about electronics and sleeping a while back to share how I am trying to figure this dilemma out. I start my day in front of the computer and end it the same way, usually checking emails right before I brush my teeth. Sad but true, and I don't think it has served me well.

Sleep positions and the quality of our sleep are two of my obsessions and I usually talk about both at workshops that I teach. Last weekend in Philadelphia, I was offering a CoreWalking workshop, and a student turned me on to F.lux, a program that you install on your computer, tablet and even phone, in order to cut down on the amount of blue light that leeches into the brain towards the end of the day and night.

Bright light, such as natural sunlight, is a “blue” light that inhibits the creation of melatonin in the brain to signal the beginning of the day. This blue light, at the right time of the day, gives us the energy to carry on. The problem is that most computer screens, tablets, and touch phone displays, as well as fluorescent and the new energy efficient light bulbs, also emit a blue light that triggers this inhibition, affecting the user’s ability to sleep and potentially disrupting the sleep cycle. If you consider that morning sunlight and your computer screen emit the same quality of this blue light it is easy to see how this can confuse a sensitive brain.

Our sleep patterns are regulated by circadian rhythms, a 24 hour cycle that responds primarily to light and darkness and is important in determining the sleeping and feeding patterns of all animals, including us humans. Circadian rhythms are produced naturally within the body, but they are affected by the light and dark which send signals to our brain to help regulate the cycles of sleeping and wakefulness.

Without getting too technical, there is a special part of the brain (supra-chiasmatic nucleus or SCN) that works with the retina of the eye to control the hormones that control sleeping and other functions. The SCN is like a light clock that stimulates, or inhibits, body functions based on the time of day or the amount of light the system is registering. The idea of the F.Lux

program is that it adjusts the color temperature of your computer to match the time of the day, inhibiting the blue light emissions rather than allowing the computer to inhibit the body's melatonin production.

Who knows if it is working? I can't say for sure but the F.Lux program has an option to shut it down for an hour to do color sensitive work, and last night I clicked it too see the difference and it was shocking how bright my screen became. The nice part is that it is installed (and it's free) and working and even if it doesn't help I don't see how it could hurt.

# Tummy Time

Posted on February 12, 2013



Babies should spend as much time on their belly's as possible and there are many reasons why. When babies are on their stomachs they have to work to lift their head, which strengthens their neck and upper back muscles. Being on their bellies also encourages more dynamic movement derived from the extremity's being grounded to the earth. A baby on its back has little control over its environment and can only move so much.

A baby on its belly needs to be able to lift and turn its head in order to be aware of their surroundings, and spending time on the belly conditions them to lift and turn the head. A baby also needs to steady its head, neck and spine when it is moved and the head lifting and turning that tummy time encourages also facilitates this necessary stability. Tummy time is also connected to the development of the shape of the head.

The painful issue here is that for thousands of years babies have died unexpectedly in their sleep without a reasonable explanation. There is a mention of such a sudden death in the bible and there are numerous



references in medical texts throughout the centuries to deaths of this nature.

The first study of what would come to be called SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) took place in the 1950's. Somewhere around 4000 babies have died each year in this unexpected fashion until the 1990's when an active campaign to teach parents to have their babies sleep on the backs for the first six months (back to bed) cut the death rate by about 30%. There is also a bias against co-sleeping amongst people working to eliminate SIDS that I think is unfortunate.

Having a baby is the greatest/most terrifying experience a sentient being can experience so I never fault people when they make choices that they think are in the best interest of their children. It is just that I don't always think those choices are investigated enough. My wife and I did not put our babies on their back to go to bed. We didn't feel that it was necessary. My wife nursed both of our children to sleep and then let them sleep any way they wanted.

But let's say that you are not ready to go there which I have no problem with. If you do sleep your baby on its back, you should try to have your baby on its belly anytime you are with it and can see it. It doesn't have to be every waking minute and your newborn might not seem to like it at first but with patience

and engagement tummy time becomes a happy and productive environment that can serve a baby for its entire life.

My daughter Ida was about three weeks old and hadn't really been on her belly much— because we were a little hesitant about knowing when to begin, and a little nervous, and Ida didn't seem all that into it—when we saw a mentor of ours at a workshop. She basically gave us the thumbs up we needed to put our baby on her belly and we never turned back.

## Co-sleeping

Posted on February 14, 2013



Both of my two children slept in our bed with us for the first two years of their life and five years later my son still shows up fairly regularly at 1am; and while I wish he wouldn't, I only complain so much.

When my wife was pregnant with our daughter Ida we had an office where we shared a desk sitting across from each other. For nine months we read books (though I tend to peruse rather than complete) and cruised the internet ingesting the likes of Ina May Gaskin, Michel Odent, Dr. Sears, Jean Liedloff (author of the Continuum Concept) and sharing the info back and forth.

At the same time I had fortuitously met an angel named Sandra Jamrog on the Upper West Side of Manhattan just as my wife became pregnant. Sandy served as a mentor and guide through pregnancy and a beautiful homebirth. Ida was born at 11pm and by 2am Marcy, our midwife, Sandy, my Sister-in-law Molly and the midwife's assistant were gone and our three hours old baby lay between us on the bed.

Co-sleeping was never much of a question for us and it was never an issue. We quickly established a fairly simple routine. My wife nursed Ida to sleep and then we would get to hang out for a while. Then when we went to bed I was allowed a 10 inch sliver of the bed as my wife and Ida spent the night providing and sucking. It was pretty easy for me with the exception of my spatial inequity. I have to admit I was a less than ideal partner in the first three or so years of both of my children's time on earth but I am terribly selfish and I didn't have breasts filled with milk (I am much better now).

A co-sleeping newborn will be able to breathe in synch with its mom all night. You can think of the first three months of life as a fourth trimester and co-sleeping reinforces that bond and connection. Baby and mother can sleep better— there were many nights where I would be woken up by Ida looking for a boob and finding one, latching on and sucking away without even waking up my wife.

I know a lot of people who set out to try co-sleeping and, for whatever reason, it didn't work out. More power to everyone — because everyone has to do what everyone has to do — but I found that co-sleeping made our lives much easier. Breastfeeding on demand goes hand in hand with co-sleeping especially because from what I learned and chose to believe, babies are

meant to feed whenever they want and they usually want to eat every two hours. If you want to provide that for your child it is a lot easier if you don't have to get out of bed two or three times a night.

I didn't expect to sleep much—it was in bold print on the baby contract—you will not sleep for a number of years. I didn't want to sign but I did and there you have it. But getting up for a minute to give up yet another inch to the sprawling mass alongside of me was a lot easier than having to get up and out of bed. Not that I would have (did I mention the selfish).

There is a strange philosophical divide about the merits of co-sleeping that gets to the heart of parenting styles. It is my belief on a deeply intuitive level that giving a baby everything it wants and needs fosters independence. Picking him or her up whenever they cry; feeding on demand; sleeping within inches of a mother's heartbeat—these things help to create a world that seems caring and nurturing and giving.

And I get it—some people have the exact opposite set of beliefs around this subject and more power to them. Many people believe that putting a baby in its own bed creates an independence that is important for the child. I disagree; of course I think I am right but it would be silly if I didn't. I have always felt that the first five years of a child's life are the most important.

The support systems we help them build in these early years determine their ability to deal with life and turmoil in adulthood.

I hope I have done right by my kids by choosing co-sleeping. There is no way to know (and there probably won't ever be) but life is a crap shoot with so many variables, and I am trying my best to give my kids a solid base upon which to stand.

## Kids Need a Lot of Sleep

Posted on February 22, 2013



My wife and I have a fairly laissez-faire approach to rules when it comes to parenting — we err on the side of indulgence in most matters. But when it comes to bedtime we are pretty rigid. Our kids are asleep sometime between 7:30 & 8:30 at night. My son is up fairly regularly at 7 and my daughter gets up with some difficulty around 7:30 for school. They are five and seven and the crazy thing is I think they could use more sleep.

As an adult I sleep between six and seven hours a night and I haven't woken up to an alarm clock in over twenty years. I don't think it would be physically possible for me to sleep eight straight hours. But in my teens and even twenties I slept and slept and slept.

In the nineteen eighties I lived for a couple of years in Jersey City, New Jersey while my girlfriend and I worked in restaurants in Manhattan. We would meet up after work and drive home, making our fair share of stops at the White Castle on Kennedy Blvd between the Holland Tunnel and our home. That was the first time I encountered little kids of all ages awake and hanging

out at three in the morning. It was a pretty surreal sight that soon became normalized with repetition.

When my daughter was two & a half we lived below a family with a boy her age who was routinely up and running around until midnight before waking up for pre-k like my daughter. I think he took four hour naps in the afternoon but still it seemed a bit much to me.

Back in the day there were a couple of books by Jerzy Kosinski that I liked though eventually his private life became more interesting/odd than his writing. One detail I remember is he would sleep twice a day. From 8 am to noon and again from 8 pm to midnight. While I found this amusing I also thought it a bit insane.

Everyone has different needs when it comes to sleep but children and teenagers need a whole lot more than most people realize. The developing brain and body have needs that we don't always tune into as childhood flies by.



## Sleeping and Spinal Decompression

Posted on February 24, 2013



There is a great video going around of former astronauts being interviewed about what it was like going into space. They speak about the experience in very cosmic/ yogic terms. When astronauts leave earth's atmosphere more than just their consciousness expands—they expand their spine as well.

The spine of an astronaut living weightless in space lengthens out, creating more space for the intervertebral discs. When they return from their journey they have a transition time for the spine to re-compress as they resume life in earth's atmosphere.

While the lack of gravity is expansive, living life on earth is not quite the same. Living in our atmosphere is compressive. Let's say you wake up in the morning and you are 5'7" tall. Over the course of the day your vertical posture will shrink about a quarter of an inch against the weight of gravity. When you go to sleep at night the spine will decompress and you will wake up 5'7" inches tall again.

There are many good reasons to get the right amount of sleep that your body needs. Giving your spine the time and space to decompress might be the most compelling one.

## Sleeping with the Fitbit One

Posted on April 15, 2013



The winter did a number on my daily goal of 15,000 steps. It wasn't particularly cold but hitting the streets in the AM chill, for whatever it was, made it easy to turn back quickly. The last couple of weeks I've got my rhythm back and I now have the help of my new toy, the Fitbit One.

This little piece of electronics addresses three of my long time interests: Walking, exercise toys, and sleeping. The Fitbit is a pedometer with a social angle because you can hook up with friends and motivate them if that is your wish. It records steps as well as stairs and one nice thing about it—it seems more generous with the steps than my old pedometer though my old pedometer cost a lot less.

Walking 15,000 steps a day is a beast of an effort. It is not hardcore exercise but it can provide you with so much of the physical work that your body needs. There have been numerous studies showing the one hour of brisk walking three days a week will lower the risk of heart disease and many other ailments as well. The standard metric for walking is usually 10,000 daily steps, which rocks, but 15,000 steps a day requires a

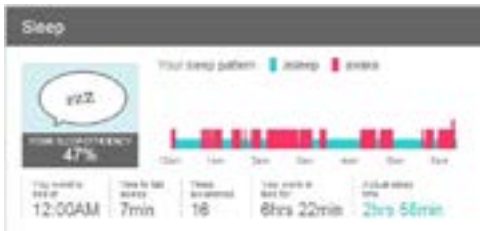
more intense commitment. To accomplish it I have to take at least one long walk in addition to the steps I get simply from my lifestyle(It helps that I have a dog).

There is another factor to consider as well—the difference between walking and walking correctly. 15,000 poorly executed steps will provide exercise, make your heart work, increase your oxygen intake etc. But it will not accomplish the main goal of my walking program which is to age gracefully. Each correct step that we take is a core exercise that draws us energetically towards the center of the body where we move around the central axis of the spine. Walking correctly builds valuable muscle tone in all the right spots.

Learning to walk and walking a lot is a great recipe for keeping your body fit and healthy long into old age. Tomorrow I'll share the scary results of tracking my sleep for the past few days.

# Fit Bit One Sleep Tracker

Posted on April 16, 2013



There was an interesting article in the New Yorker last month that covered the field of sleep research. The

takeaway was that it remains a mystery. The writer at one point underwent sleep testing where he was wired up for a night sleep and all his patterns were analyzed. Reading it, I thought to myself that I would love to spend a night in one of those facilities.

Thanks to my new exercise toy I don't have to leave the house to get a reading on how I sleep. Wearing the Fitbit One Sleep Tracker on your wrist and turning it on right before bed will produce a graph like the one in the picture on the left. That was my first night's sleep and it scared the bejesus out of me.

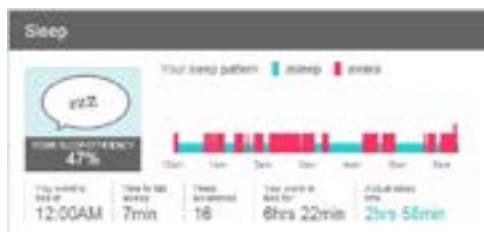
According to the graph I slept precious little. In bed for 6 hours and 19 minutes, I only slept for 3 hours and 53 minutes. That can't be good. It took me 21 minutes to fall asleep and if I remember the article correctly the writer fell asleep in 2 minutes. I woke up seven times but it is crazy for me to look at the chart and see that I was basically awake from 2:45-3:50 with five minutes of sleep in between.

Maybe I am being dramatic but I find these results to be intense. It isn't that I walk through the day like a zombie—I tend to have pretty good energy, but less than four hours of sleep a night can't be good.

There is one caveat that I am hoping will save me. I am just finishing the first week of a month long cleanse and I am hoping that maybe the detoxification is messing with my sleep. I am very curious to find out over the next couple of weeks.

# Why The Fitbit Freaks Me Out

Posted on May 3, 2013



The Fitbit One is a slightly high tech pedometer that synchs with your computer and provides a load of

information via stats and graphs. There are a number of similar products on the market and I think they all serve people well. I am an information junkie and I only recently (a decade) turned a lifelong obsession with knowledge of the outside world into learning about what goes on inside my body.

The Fitbit has some cool features such as an altimeter that registers hills and stairs, and a sleep tracker which was the ostensible reason for my purchase. I've had it about a month now and while I love it, what I am learning scares me to no small degree.

According to my tracker I barely sleep, dozing slightly more than half of the time that I am in bed. Last week my average sleep was 3 hours and 22 minutes, waking up an average of ten times a night. To be honest I don't know how bad that is or how much real sleep other people get but that just doesn't seem like enough. Research and reporting on sleep is all over the map and no one knows all that much that is definitive.

I think I am a fairly active person. My average step count for last week was just under 16,000 steps which involves being out and about. But according to my Fitbit dashboard I am sedentary more than half of my waking hours. Yesterday was the first day I actually made it to fifty percent but I couldn't get across that threshold. The device calculates an active score and I have maintained its goal all but a couple of days but being sedentary over fifty percent of my waking hours seems intense.

That is why the Fitbit freaks me out. I want to sleep more and sit less—a basic prescription for a happy and healthy old age.

## Accommodating The Psoas When Sleeping

Posted on August 7, 2013



The picture to the left is my son Reggie. His sleep position mirrors how I slept for the first forty years of my life. One knee hiked up, basically sleeping on the stomach which is just awful for the spine but easy for the psoas muscle. Technically this isn't full on stomach sleeping which is even worse but, really, who wants to win a misery contest?

Sleeping on the stomach compresses the curve of the lumbar spine from which no good can come. Sleeping for hours, with one knee higher than the other, torques the pelvis for the whole time you are sleeping. Again no good can come from a pelvis that is misaligned for hours at a time. Why we do this is another story. I have always felt that the body finds itself in this position as a means of accommodating the psoas that might be tight and which will be much more comfortable with the leg and hip flexed.

For years I woke up with a stiff and achy back, and when I finally committed to sleeping on my side with my legs together and slightly bent, it didn't take long for a lot of my nightly discomfort to pass. Personally, I didn't need to tie my legs together to stop them from separating but I know plenty of people who had to go that far in order to change a lifelong habit.



The classic manifestation of a tight psoas is for the affected leg to shorten as it is pulled up into the hip socket as the foot turns out. In the upper body the pelvis and shoulder of the same side as the affected leg draw closer to each other. This whole side appears contracted. I don't think Reggie has a particularly tight psoas so I am not exactly sure why he gravitates towards this position unless the pattern was in my DNA that I shared with him because he has never seen me sleep that way (my daughter never sleeps in this position). And he isn't limited to this position; he spins like a top in the course of a night assuming multiple shapes.

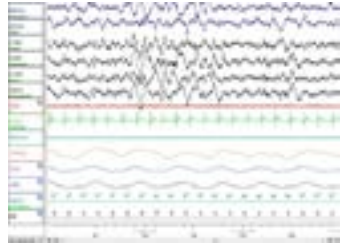
So many people carry around aches and pains that are relatively easy to resolve but require a conscious approach to repetitive patterns that we take for granted. Most people do not for a second consider that their sleep position could be harmful. And then there are those who intuit that the way that they sleep could be a problem due to the way they wake up but still don't make the leap to necessary change.

There are injuries that we suffer as a direct result of an action—a car accident, a fall down stairs—but there are also repetitive stress injuries that add up over years of poor patterning. While I realize that most people wouldn't consider sleeping as the cause of a repetitive stress injury I don't see why it wouldn't be.

# How Much Sleep Do I Need?

Posted on September 11, 2013

How much sleep do I need to live a healthy active life? I can't seem to find hard fast answers but I know that I don't sleep much. I have been wearing the Fitbit One



sleep tracker (my nemesis) for months now and the results it shows me both blow my mind and freak me out. I wear the Fitbit on my wrist when I sleep and it registers anytime that I move. Not only do I move but I wake up, unbeknownst to me, all night long.

The protagonist of the current trashy novel that I am reading made an offhand comment about being a fifty one year old man who sleeps little and wakes up four or five times a night. I am fifty and I fear I am that guy. In terms of actual sleep I have only gone over the four hour mark two or three times since I got my sleep tracker.

One piece of information the tracker gives me is "sleep efficiency" and I hover around 50% a night which can't be good. The graph above is from last night and is fairly indicative of most of my evenings. In truth I don't walk around exhausted and I feel like I have good energy during the day and I couldn't nap if I wanted to.

The bedeviling thing is that the information out there is fairly sketchy. When I google how much sleep do I need I see lots of studies without much hard data. It is something of a guessing game. A fairly consistent number you see for adults is 7-9 hours but I can't even imagine spending that much time in bed let alone getting that much sleep. I feel like I live a charmed life in that I haven't needed to use an alarm clock for over twenty years. I wake up when I wake up and once that happens, usually between 6 & 7am, I couldn't go back to sleep under any circumstances.

The three hours of actual sleep that the above graph shows is pretty standard for me and instinctually I can't imagine that it is good but I don't know what to do to change it. I have experimented with a lot of options since I got the infernal contraption. I have tried going to sleep earlier and later, eating earlier and later, sugar and no sugar, more and less caffeine. I guess the next step is to kick coffee totally (I am down to one cup a day).

How much sleep do I need? Exactly what I get seems to be the simple answer but I want to live a long life and most research, as limited as it is, tells me that my average of three hours is not serving me. What's a boy to do?

## The Arm Under My Head

Posted on September 30, 2013

I am writing yet again about my obsession with sleeping and sleeping positions. Since I bought my fit bit sleep tracker I dutifully record my sleep and suffer accordingly at



my lack thereof. According to my electronic nemesis I haven't had more than four hours and ten minutes of actual sleep since tracking began (about four months ago) telling me what kind of rest I get at night. I have never gone over sixty percent efficiency—both time and efficiency are features that the Fitbit informs me of at my own peril.

Caffeine is the latest of my pleasures to bite the dust in an attempt to up the duration of my slumber and I will give it a month and see if there is any effect. Sugar is going the way of all things as well. I am pulling out all the stops.

This past weekend my family and I had the pleasure of staying in a two hundred year old house in Cornwall Connecticut, a stunningly beautiful hamlet a couple of hours from the city. It was a wonderful weekend of reading and eating and letting the children run wild (with bow and arrows, among other things, which will

be the subject of tomorrows post).

When it came time to sleep my wife and I shared a full sized bed—which is not at all an accurate description—with a mattress that seemed as soft as a pillow. As I have gotten older I have found it harder to sleep when I am not in my own bed which is odd for someone who used to be able to sleep anywhere at any time.

I managed to snare pillows to setup a sleeping environment similar to what I have at home. Two pillows under the head with a third between my legs—one hand wedges between the pillow and my upper thigh and the other sits under the pillows by my head with my arm at a right angle. For whatever reason this arrangement which works like a charm in Brooklyn (though there have been some bumps in the road over the years) was a sleep ender in Connecticut. Regardless of which side of my body I was sleeping on I woke up repeatedly throughout the night with varying stages of numbness in the elbow, wrist and fingers.

It was a fairly unbearable experience. I have been meaning to write about the brachial plexus, the network of nerves that emanate from the neck to feed the arm but haven't gotten around to it. For whatever the reason my sleeping positions, due to the bed, the pillows, the change of environment or maybe something else that

I can't figure, were clearly compressing something in the nerves that innervate the arm and I was losing all sense of feeling in the bottom arm no matter which side I was laying on.

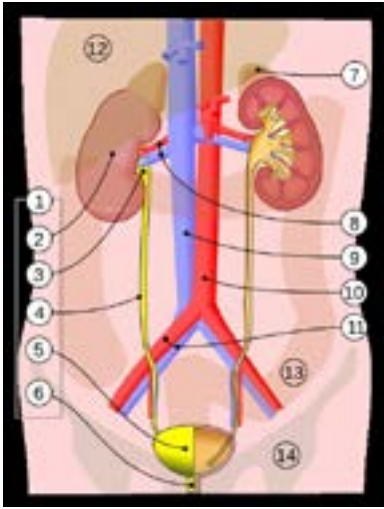
While I have had other issues with sleeping positions that I have previously documented on the blog, this experience blew my mind and ruined my rest.

Sleeping is so critical to a fruitful life and though I might be a tad neurotic about it, I truly think that the quality of our sleep can make or break the goal of living a long and healthy life. This weekend's experience with sleeping positions that so negatively affected me, actually made me grateful for how relatively good I have it, but also made me acutely aware of how environment and physical space can mess with our basic functioning.

I have worked with numerous clients who reported similar symptoms and though I could always empathize—feeling is truly believing. We got home late last night and I had a numb free sleep though it was only 3 hours and 12 minutes with 50% efficiency.

# Sleeping and Peeing

Posted on October 10, 2013



I get that Sleeping and peeing are a contradiction in terms. But I also get that sleeping and peeing are two issues that so many people grapple with. Peeing repeatedly interrupts sleeping for so many, and uninterrupted sleep is more beneficial than most people realize.

If you think of the human body as a rechargeable battery, sleep is doing the recharging. Without enough sleep our batteries will lose power over the course of decades and eventually run out altogether. Sleeping interrupted by repeated peeing during the night can be a main source of battery depletion.

Before the age of forty there is no reason we should not be able to sleep through the night, or get anywhere from 6-8 hours, without waking up to pee. After forty, as the ageing process begins to kick in, it is reasonable to wake up once a night a few nights a week; reasonable but not necessary. The painful truth is that many people's lives are ruled by sleeping and

peeing—waking up multiple times a night to empty a bladder that should not need emptying.

I have numerous concerns when it comes to the human body and ageing—sleeping and incontinence top the list, with a big nod to a happy psoas. When it comes to sleeping I have written numerous times about sleep positions and their effect on the body in terms of pain and injury as well as the quality of sleep.

And now let's add peeing and sleeping to the list. Cruising around the internet for information on nocturia, the medical term for sleeping and peeing, I could not find a single reference to a connection to sleep positioning as a possible factor. It is hard for me to make any scientific pronouncements because my findings are all anecdotal but I have had numerous instances of clients alleviating these problems by changing sleep positions and/or releasing the psoas.

If you suffer from sleeping and peeing issues there are other things to try beyond drinking less and taking medication. If you are a stomach sleeper, stop immediately. If you sleep on your side with one leg hiked up higher than the other it is sort of like sleeping on your stomach so bring your legs together. It is not a big leap for me to think that putting direct pressure on your bladder while sleeping will create the need to pee in the middle of the night.



As always I am quick to point out that this is a hypothesis without science behind it but it can't hurt to try if you suffer from problems with peeing and sleeping.

### **Illustration Key**

1. Human urinary system
2. Kidney
3. Renal pelvis
4. Ureter
5. Urinary bladder
6. Urethra. (Left side with frontal section)
7. Adrenal gland Vessels
8. Renal artery and vein
9. Inferior vena cava
10. Abdominal aorta
11. Common iliac artery and vein with transparency
12. Liver
13. Large intestine
14. Pelvis

## Why Do We Get Calf Cramps At Night?

Posted on October 16, 2013

Nothing makes me happier than saying “I don’t know.” Because that is usually followed by some research and some information so that the



next time I am asked about whatever it was I didn’t know, I would have a reasonable answer. And it is very rare that such a scenario doesn’t play out.

Yet there didn’t seem to be any definitive answer to the question “why do I get calf cramp at night?”

My nephew came over for dinner the other night and was telling me how he occasionally gets calf cramps at night. I vaguely knew about this problem—it happened to me twice about twenty years ago—and that there wasn’t much out there by way of explanation.

So after he left I sat down with my friend Google and learned that there wasn’t much to be learned—Lots of theories but very little by way of explanation. Pregnant women tend to get them more than most. Body builders are highly susceptible and there are numerous weight lifting forums on the topic. But ordinary Joe’s got them as well and as often. Aside from sleeping there is a bunch of literature on runners

getting cramps due to electrolyte imbalance and I'll return to this a bit later.

Calf cramps at night are the real deal. They are extremely painful contractions of the calf muscles. They don't always release easily with the muscle often remaining cramped and contracted. Touching the calves when this happens can feel like you are handling a rock.

Here are some of the numerous thoughts that the internet shared on the matter. As simply a matter of physicality cramping can happen during sleep because of an exaggeration of a normal muscle reflex. Tossing and turning while asleep, you can stimulate nerve stretch receptors in the tendon, telling the calf muscles to contract.

Diet seems to be the most common shot in the dark / explanation that I read about with dehydration being a close second. In terms of diet, potassium deficiency was high on the list. But a quick review of the many forums on the topic had numerous sufferers that both drank plenty of fluids and ate more than their share of bananas.

Among the many mysteries of life you wouldn't think that calf cramps at night would be an elusive one.

There is a solution if you want to dive deep into folk

remedies but by all accounts it is a solution that works. Put a bar of ivory soap under the sheets of your bed. And if after a few months the cramps return, replace the first bar with a new one which seemed to work for most people who tried it.

Keeping in mind that I found nothing definitive in terms of reasons or solutions for calf cramps at night I headed out yesterday morning to teach, not thinking that students would provide me with the answers. In the beginning of class, as I do at the start of many of my classes, I walked around standing people up in my version of good posture throwing around my usual rap.

“You won’t necessarily believe me but try to feel what your body is doing as I shift your posture. It should be confusing as I often think my job is to confuse people.”

From that cue I started talking about the futile search for an explanation about calf cramps at night. When I mentioned the bar of soap someone piped up “ph”, and upon further questioning said the bar of soap made perfect sense because it created a ph balanced environment under the sheets that would help keep the muscles from cramping.

After class another student had two interesting things to say. One was that she found lemon water to be

helpful, which is also a ph balancing act. I drink lemon water every morning at the suggestion of my Chinese medicine doctor. He is always trying to balance my ph levels. And she also reported that when she lived in a mold-infested house, her whole family got calf cramps at night. There was nothing about this in anything I read online.

As a result I feel less confused. I now have a reasonably good idea why calf cramps at night happen. A ph imbalance coupled with naturally tight muscles can make your muscles cramp at night and trying to balance your ph with either a bar of soap or by drinking lemon water is as likely, or more likely, to take care of the problem than anything else. It also makes sense that just straight water without an emphasis on balancing ph levels might not help with calf cramps at night.

## The Wrist And Hand Under My Head When I Sleep

Posted on November 9, 2013

The wrist and hand that rest under my head when I am asleep want to do things I would prefer them not to do. And I am having trouble breaking



them of their habit. If I sleep on my left side, the hand under my head tends to ball into a gentle fist and the wrist flexes slightly.

What I teach in yoga classes and my CoreWalking Program is nothing more than behavior modification—if you have a habit, change that habit. The problem is that breaking decade's long habits (that very often we are not even aware of) isn't always easy. Add that some of these habits occur while we are sleeping and things can get very complicated.

I wonder at times if I am freakishly preoccupied with sleeping. The first thing I do each morning upon waking is check my Fitbit sleep graph. Sleeping well and ageing gracefully are intimately linked in my mind which is how I justify the efforts I put into improving my sleep. And my sleep has improved by about an hour a night over the last few months.

Back to my wrist and hand. I fall asleep on my right side and switch sides a number of times through the night. I sleep with one hand under my head in between two pillows and my other hand in between my thighs which also have a pillow between them.

All is well and good on my right side but like I said, when I turn over onto my left my hand makes a fist and my wrist flexes. This feels awful an hour or so later when I roll back to the right. And no amount of effort seems to rectify the situation. I start out with my hand and wrist flat and straight and before long it has curled into a ball.

What seems most strange to me is that I would expect this of my right side wrist and hand which is where I tend to have some shoulder issues. So if the right side hand and wrist were affected I could attribute it to the neck and shoulder problems. But it only happens on the left side and it is maddening.

And while I know that I might focus on this stuff a bit too much, I don't like that it happens and that I can't seem to break the patterns.

## Sleeping With My Mouth Taped Shut

Posted on December 4, 2013

Sleeping with my mouth taped shut is the latest in my endless attempts to improve the effectiveness of my sleep. I track my sleeping patterns with my Fitbit pedometer and slowly but surely my efforts are paying off.



I first learned about taping my mouth shut from a friend who studied the Buteyko breathing method. This was developed in the 1950's by Ukrainian doctor Konstantin Buteyko as a treatment for asthma. The Buteyko method proposes the idea that many people are hyperventilating without knowing it. As I wrote a couple of days ago hyperventilation can lead to low carbon dioxide levels in the blood.

I tried taping my mouth shut once before with limited results though I don't honestly remember why I stopped. Since that time I have definitely put more conscious effort into breathing through my nose more regularly in my waking life so maybe that is why sleeping with my mouth taped shut seems so much easier this second time around. The first time I had general issues with panic that would come up when I first put the tape on. Now that doesn't happen at all.



People are often recommended to sleep with their mouth shut for sleep apnea but in that case there is a sort of mask that they sell that goes around the chin and crown of the head that keeps the jaw as well as the mouth shut. This same device is often suggested to help with snoring, though I think the mouth taped shut might help that issue as well.

As an aside I was asked in a yoga class recently what poses make me angry or uncomfortable and my reply was while the asanas themselves all make me happy the practice of exhale retention freaks me out. I have fairly good access to the breath and don't have a big problem with holding my breath on the inhale but trying to hold my breath after exhaling takes me to the brink of panic in very short order.

Back to sleeping with my mouth taped shut. Strange positive things happen within minutes of trying to go to sleep with my mouth taped shut. If my nose is stuffed when I first lay down, it clears up within a minute or two and my nostrils clear. I honestly don't know why this happens but it does so consistently.

If I wasn't taping my mouth shut I would breathe through the mouth all night long and there are many health advantages to breathing through the nose. For one, again relating to Monday's post about chest breathing and panic, breathing through the

mouth tends to activate, or more easily activate, the sympathetic nervous system which controls our flight or fight response.

Breathing through the nose warms and moistens the air as well as acting as a filter against contaminants in the air. It improves the oxygenation of the blood as well as reducing the heart rate. And it can help with snoring.

For all of these reasons in addition to my compulsive need to improve the duration and quality of my sleep, I will continue sleeping with my mouth taped shut for a while. For anyone interested, I am using a paper tape from CVS that is effortless to remove, and leaves little or no residue in the morning.

# Sleep Efficiency And Taping My Mouth Shut At Night

Posted on December 16, 2013



I have written numerous times about sleep efficiency as it relates to my Fitbit sleep tracker. This sleep efficiency statistic is the latest focus of my yearning for a good night rest. I have been using the Fitbit sleep tracker for months now and I am endlessly fascinated by what its graphs tell me.

If you wear the Fitbit to bed on your non dominant wrist, you wake up to a stream of fascinating information. It will share how long it took to fall asleep, how many times you were restless, how often you were restless and how much actual sleep you got.

Finally it gives a percentage for sleep efficiency. It bases its formula in a fairly simple way. It records from the moment you first fall asleep to the time you wake up and provides you with its sleep efficiency rating.

When I started using the tracker my efficiency was fairly horrible. I was way below 50% and have instituted many changes in the attempt to improve it. About two weeks ago I started taping my mouth shut when I go to sleep at night.

As I wrote last week I tried doing this last year to ill effect. It made me panic and simply didn't feel that good. While I am not sure exactly why I decided to give it another go, this second time around it has been easy and actually comforting.

One reason it is healthier to breathe through the nose than through the mouth is you get more oxygen to the brain which can have profound benefits. If I am in bed for six or seven hours a night that is a whole lot more positive gaseous exchange which is the essence of breathing –oxygen in and carbon dioxide out.

The most obvious side effect of taping my mouth shut has been watching my sleep efficiency numbers go up consistently since the tape hit my lips. I have been somewhere between 60% and 70% for each of the last ten days which I have to admit makes me stupidly pleased.

In my efforts to age well—or at least better than my parents—sleep plays a huge role. My mother was/is something of an insomniac and my father was plagued by nightmares that kept him from sleeping. I believe that their lack of good sleep was partially to blame for the eventual breakdown of their bodies.

I am hoping that snoozing well and improving my sleep efficiency will help me stave off the old age that wasn't so physically kind to them.