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EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW

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SLEEP SPECIAL

The secrets to nailing the ultimate eight hours

But, if you're looking to find out how to become a snoozing champ, Lindsay has some great insights into why we need a proper night's kip and, more importantly, how to make sure you can get one.



THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP

"Sleep is arguably the most important thing you can do for your body," Dr Lindsay says. "It's scientifically associated with reduced depression and anxiety, reduced risk of certain cancers and dementia, and it will increase your immunity. Also, when you sleep, you process what's going on emotionally in your life – so it's a bit like free therapy – and it's important for maintaining a healthy weight."

Dr Lindsay describes sleep as your body's way of tidying up after a busy day. Obviously, the quality determines whether you're having a quick dust and shoving things behind a cushion or if you're having a proper Mrs Hinch-style deep clean. "Your brain doesn't switch off when you sleep," says

Lindsay. "It goes through a whole host of different processes, which each have different jobs. Some are to physically repair your body, while dreaming is how you process emotions and make sense of a difficult situation. If you're not sleeping enough, your brain doesn't have time to do that. It's like if you're too busy to clean your

'Sleep is the most important thing you can do'

bathroom – after a while, it would be a bit icky, but after around six months, it would be really bad. You can survive on little sleep in the short term, but long term, you risk lasting problems, as your brain will do all the things it urgently needs to do first – like regulate

breathing – and things like processing your emotions become less of a priority."

PANDEMIC PROBS

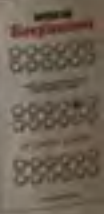
The associated stresses of the global pandemic meant your brain's nighttime to-do list got a whole lot longer. Dr Lindsay says, "Even the best sleepers won't sleep well when they're hit with a stressful situation, and that's perfectly normal. When you're anxious, your fight-or-flight response increases adrenalin and

[stress hormone] cortisol production, and increases your heart rate, making it harder to sleep. Also, your brain has been trying to make sense of a very different situation than normal. It's making our dreams vivid, meaning you'll wake up more

and have more disrupted sleep."

Dr Lindsay adds, "Lifestyle factors are also hugely impacting our sleep. We don't have a 9-5 routine any more, so we're going to bed and waking up at irregular times. Our circadian rhythm – which is our 24-hour body clock – doesn't like that. It needs a regular routine, seven days a week. Even when you move your routine an hour or two at the weekends, it disrupts your sleep. That's the reason many people suffer with Sunday night insomnia."

Navigating Sleeplessness: How To Sleep Deeper And Better For Longer
by Dr Lindsay Browning (Welbeck Balance, £8.99)
is available to buy online now





SLEEP 101

TRAIN YOUR 3AM PANIC BRAIN

Dr Lindsay says: "You want to replace your busy nighttime thoughts with something so complex, there's little room to think about anything else. Imagine somewhere you would really love to be and start creating this image in a really detailed way. If it's a beach, then picture the sunlight glittering on the sea. Think about what you can smell and hear – can you feel the breeze on your skin? Also, make time in the day to stop and think about things that might be making you feel stressed, otherwise you'll think about them at night when your brain has space."

Go for a run or have a relaxing bath where you can work through these thoughts and help you to sleep better."

DITCH YOUR SLEEP TRACKER

Dr Lindsay says: "Orthosomnia is where you give yourself a sleeping problem by trying to have the perfect sleep. The more you think about sleep and try harder to get better, the worse it gets. If you're worried about your sleep, sleep trackers can be counter-productive. And they're not always 100 per cent accurate, either."

SUSS YOUR SLEEP SWEATS

Dr Lindsay says: "Generally, it's down to a hormone imbalance. Check that your bedcovers and mattress are allowing air to flow through them. Don't let your bedroom get too hot, sleep in pyjamas made from natural fibres, and ensure your duvet is clean."

MYTH BUSTING

We all know what we should do to be better at sleeping, but it's often hard to do it. Dr Lindsay reassures us that making slight changes are all it takes...

THE MYTH: WE NEED TO DITCH OUR DEVICES AT 7PM

THE TRUTH: "The advice about turning your devices off at a certain time gets taken a bit too far. If you've got kids and you're trying to work flexibly, maybe work has to happen in the evening, so we can't put our devices down at 7pm. It's not the end of the world – just make sure that you've got the blue light mode switched off."

THE MYTH: YOU SHOULDN'T WORK IN YOUR BEDROOM

THE TRUTH: "We don't all have home

offices, so if you have to work in your bedroom, just don't work in bed – that way, when you lie down to go to sleep, your brain isn't thinking about replying to emails instead of falling asleep. We want our bed to just be a place for sleep and sex."

THE MYTH: YOU SHOULDN'T EAT LATE AT NIGHT

THE TRUTH: "You shouldn't eat a main meal right before you go to bed. However, if you go to bed hungry, your body is likely to wake up around three or four in the morning, so it's good to have a pre-bedtime snack, especially if you have your dinner early. It could be a glass of milk and an oat cookie or a small bowl of porridge, which releases complex carbs slowly, as they take a long time to break down."