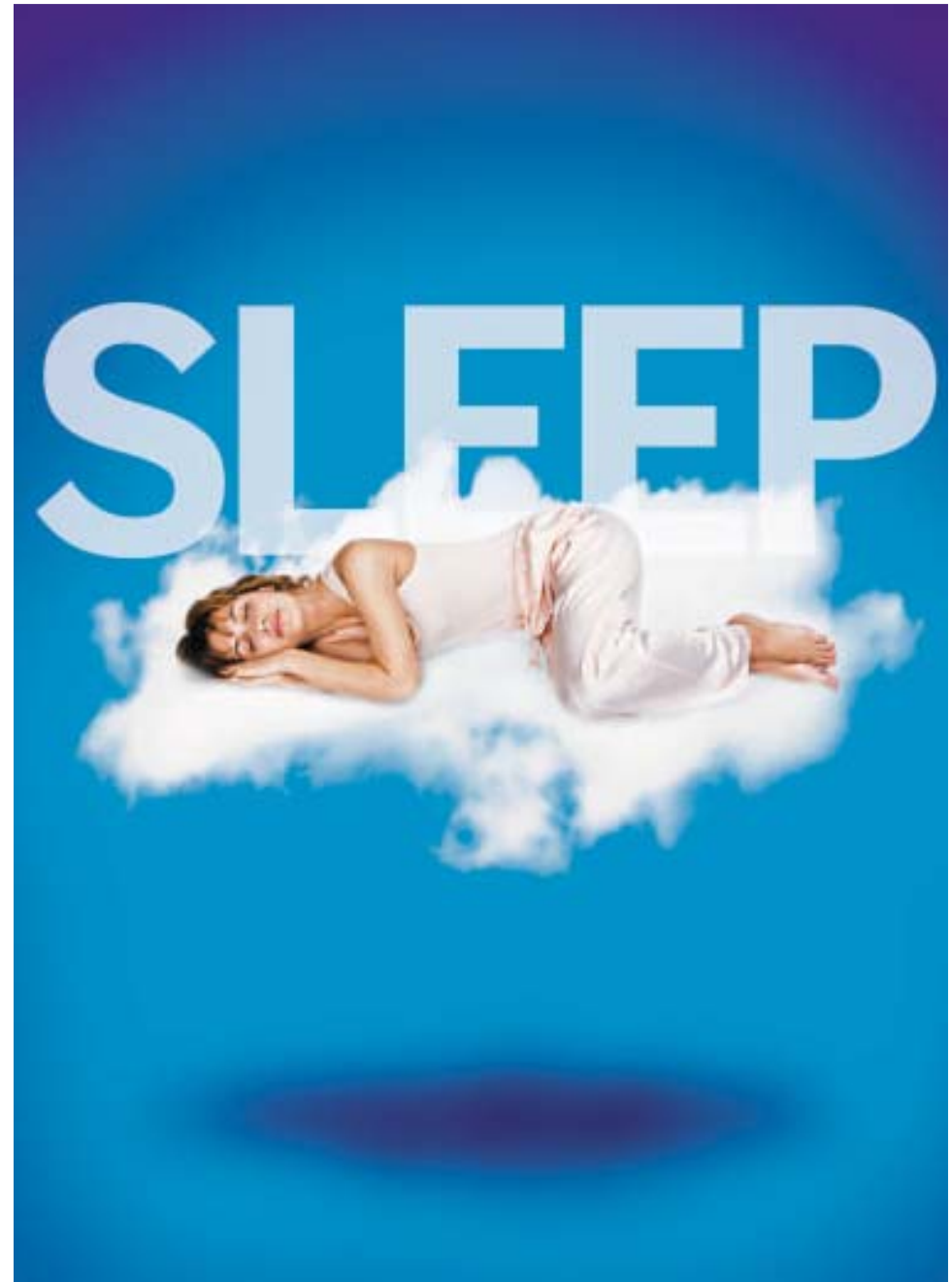


magic power of

BY LORI MILLER KASE

How it makes you **happier, healthier, sexier, even thinner**

WHEN DID 24/7 BECOME A WAY OF LIFE? The massive decline in sleep has happened so slowly and seamlessly that few of us seemed to notice the trend. Was it because of the Internet, video games and endless TV channels? Never disconnecting from work? No matter how it happened, millions of chronically sleep-deprived Britons are putting their health, quality of life and even *length* of life in jeopardy. New evidence shows why getting enough zzzs may trump all your other priorities.



magic power 1 live longer and healthier

In Britain we now get less than seven hours of shut-eye a night on average and for many of us it's taking a toll. "There's a clear connection between sleep and health, sleep deprivation and disease—and the evidence is getting stronger," says Francesco Cappuccio, professor of cardiovascular medicine and epidemiology at Warwick Medical School.

For example, we're getting an hour less sleep than we did 100 years ago. At the same time, high blood pressure has become an increasing problem. Blood pressure and heart rate are typically at their lowest levels during

sleep; people who sleep less tend to have higher blood pressure. Women who skimp on sleep are particularly at risk, says Professor Cappuccio: "Those who sleep five hours or less a night are twice as likely to suffer from hypertension as women who sleep seven hours or more."

Other new research findings from a Warwick study of the sleep patterns of some 10,000 Britons link cutting sleep to five hours or less with a doubled risk of dying from cardiovascular disease. Shortage of sleep is also linked to increased risk—in men and women—of weight gain and diabetes.

Sleeping better may help you fight off illness, says Dr John Shneerson,

one woman's sleep makeover

For years, Jacqueline Rivera tried to conquer her daily migraines by seeing specialist after specialist. Her GP, meanwhile, urged Rivera to tackle her other health problems. She was overweight and had high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high blood sugar. But it wasn't until Rivera uncovered a problem she didn't even know she had that everything else fell into place.

The 44-year-old court clerk never had trouble falling asleep. In fact, she typically slept eight to nine hours a night and napped during her commute to work and at lunchtime. But when she mentioned to her doctor that no matter how much she slept, she woke up feeling exhausted, he referred her to a sleep clinic, where she was monitored overnight. She learned she had obstructive sleep

apnoea, a condition that caused her to stop breathing several times an hour during sleep, preventing her from getting a restful slumber. Once she was treated for the dangerous disorder, she began waking up feeling energetic for the first time in years. "I started exercising," she says. "I started eating better. I lost nearly two stone. I stopped smoking. My doctor was getting ready to put me on medication. But my blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar have all gone down. Even my headaches have become less intense and less frequent. Good sleep helped me do all the other things I needed to do."

The bottom line? "If you want to improve your health," says sleep expert Dr John Shneerson, "make sure you get your quota of good quality sleep."

if anxiety is keeping you awake, write down your worries, then deal with them tomorrow



director of Britain's largest sleep centre at Papworth Hospital, Cambridge. "People who are sleep-deprived show raised levels of stress hormones. There are also signs of persistent inflammation in the blood and a decrease in immune function."

Simply stated, people who sleep well live longer. So say goodnight sooner and it may help you stay active and vital to a ripe old age.

magic power 2 look better, feel better

People limited to four or five hours' sleep for several nights not only experience more physical ailments, such as headaches and stomach problems, but also undergo changes in metabolism similar to those occurring with normal ageing. No wonder we look terrible after a sleepless night.

One of the reasons may be growth hormones. They're essential to keeping us looking good as we get older. Levels drop dramatically between the ages of 20 and 60, says heart surgeon Dr Mehmet Oz, co-author of the *You* health books (Harper Thorsons). "Growth hormones are rejuvenating,"

he says. "When you have high levels of the hormone, you have more muscle mass, better skin and you feel sexy. The best way to keep your growth hormones as high as possible is sleep." When you don't look good, you don't feel sexy and your relationship can suffer. So getting more sleep can rev up your love life too.

magic power 3 be happier, less stressed

More than one in four of us suffer at least three bad nights' sleep a week, according to a survey by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. People with insomnia produce higher rates of stress hormones, putting their bodies in a hyper-aroused state that makes it difficult to wind down. Inability to sleep causes more stress. It can be devastating.

"You're depressed, you keep forgetting things—not sleeping was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me," recalls Paul Nielson, 42. When his insomnia was at its worst, Paul went 30 days with barely 30 hours' sleep. "I missed work, even drove my car into

★ avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, exercise and bright light before bedtime



some bushes,” he says, “because I just couldn’t focus any more.”

“People who do not sleep get depressed. Depression causes insomnia, so it’s a vicious cycle,” says Dr Oz. “But

we know the inverse is also true: that more and better sleep can make you feel happier.”

magic power 4 build a better brain

“Not only does a lack of sleep, or poor quality sleep, lead to poor health, it also interferes with our concentration, our memory, our very ability to communicate with each other,” says Dr Shneerson. Anything that disturbs the quality and quantity of sleep can have long-term consequences for both body and mind.

Lack of sleep can have effects similar to those brought on by too much alcohol. The performance of someone who’s been awake for 17 hours straight is about the same as if she had a blood alcohol level of 50mg/100ml of blood (two drinks in an hour).

And night owls, beware. A new study shows that people with two copies of a gene variant that helps control our body clocks tend towards a “late to bed, late to rise” sleeping pattern. They may suffer worse cognitive deficits after sleep deprivation, such as forgetfulness and trouble concentrating.

Last year some 3,000 deaths and

how to sleep easy

Can’t get to sleep? Dr John Shneerson, director of Papworth Hospital’s sleep centre, suggests these strategies:

Stick to a regular bedtime. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time. Changing your sleep routine confuses your inbuilt body clock, leading to surface sleep.

Exercise. Thirty minutes’ strenuous exercise during the day can lift anxiety and help you unwind. A brisk walk is ideal.

Take a bath. A long, hot soak will raise your body temperature. By bedtime, it will start to fall, an internal sign that tells your body it’s time to sleep.

Keep the room restful. A quiet, dark, cool environment is most conducive to sound sleep. Blackout blinds can help.

Invest in a bed. Is your bed more than ten years old, sagging, lumpy, giving you backache? It may need replacing. A firm, supportive mattress aids sleep.

serious injuries on our roads were caused by people driving while fatigued. And a disturbing new study conducted by a US biomedical research lab within the Department of Defense shows that lack of sleep can affect people’s moral judgement.

This finding has implications for people such as doctors and soldiers, whose decisions have life-and-death consequences. But just think what could happen if sleep-deprived lawyers, police officers or politicians were more subject to moral lapses. Better sleep may equal better decision-making.

magic power 5 lose some weight

“It comes as no surprise that the trend towards shorter sleep duration has coincided with an alarming rise in obesity,” says Professor Cappuccio. “Early results from a major review

we’re carrying out at Warwick of the sleep patterns of children as well as adults indicate that people who get insufficient sleep double their risk of being obese.” This trend can be seen in children as young as five. “People who are sleep-deprived have increased appetite,” says Cappuccio. Inadequate sleep lowers levels of leptin, the hormone that causes us to feel full, while increasing levels of ghrelin, the hormone that makes us feel hungry.

What’s also fascinating is that sleep deprivation influences our food choices, making us crave high-carb, high-sugar foods. This is because sleep loss decreases insulin sensitivity, putting the sleep-deprived at higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

So sleep more and it may be easier to fight that craving for cakes and wake up a whole new you.

STAR TREATMENT

Apparently some young children in California are complaining that a “weird man” keeps popping up at their school and singing “scary songs” to them. Are their parents concerned? Not really, reports the *New York Post*. The man is in fact Bob Dylan, who likes to visit his grandson at school.

“The kids don’t really appreciate that they’re in the presence of a musical legend,” said one parent. “They just think of him as the weird guitar guy.”

