

# 10 Tips to Better Sleep for Optimal Recovery

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Parents, athletes, and coaches have known for years that getting plenty of sleep is one of the most important factors in optimal recovery in sports. However, it still seems that most athletes are sleep deprived and as a result, often not achieving full recovery from games, practices and/or workouts.

When discussing sleep, it is particularly important to understand that the greatest value is in getting deep sleep. Scientists say that there are 5 stages of sleep, beginning with light sleep, then moving on to deep sleep and finally REM sleep. Deep sleep occurs in stages 3 and 4. You can only get to stages 3 and 4 by first experiencing stages 1 and 2. All too often, our sleep is disrupted throughout the night, limiting our amount of deep sleep. Each time we are disrupted, we begin again at stage 1. It takes about 90 minutes for a complete cycle of stages 1 through 5. This is optimal: deep, uninterrupted sleep.

So, why is deep sleep so important? This is where the body goes through natural restorative processes such as the release of growth hormone, which plays a major role in tissue repair (such as muscle). Not getting restful sleep and allowing the body to get to stages 3 and 4 denies the body of the best natural recovery methods available.

## **10 Tips to Better Sleep:**

1. Make your room as dark as possible. Remove or eliminate any light sources such as computer monitors, TV's, night lights, etc. If you cannot get the room really dark, you can try using a sleeping mask.
2. Make sure the room is at a comfortable temperature. Set the room temp to the way you feel most comfortable when you sleep. Our sleep cycles have a sensitivity to light. When our eyes and brain senses light, it sends a signal to "wake-up", making it more difficult to get the deep sleep needed for optimal recovery.
3. Don't eat high carbohydrate meals or snacks (or high glycemic foods—foods that digest quickly or spike your insulin levels rapidly such as white breads and starchy carbs) within 2 hours of going to bed. An acceptable snack would be something like a handful of almonds and an 8 oz glass of milk. The almonds have a slow release fat which will be metabolized slowly during the night, helping to fight any hunger pangs that might normally creep up during your sleep.
4. Remove any potential distractions or disruptions from your room (such as phone ringers, dogs barking, etc.). Remember, it is key to have uninterrupted sleep.
5. Add white noise from items such as fans, humidifiers, etc, or wear earplugs. It is important to keep it as quiet as possible. I know many people who like to fall asleep to the sound of the TV. Quite often, they are disrupted several times throughout the night by loud infomercials, flashy lights or other distractions from the TV. Replace the TV with a fan if you need noise.
6. Relax the mind and body before going to bed. It is almost impossible to fall asleep within 30 minutes after an intense workout. Relax the body, and relax the mind. Read a book, or meditate (really nice if you have a massage chair!) and prepare the mind and body for sleep.

7. Avoid too much caffeine consumption. Also avoid caffeine consumption after 2pm. Consuming large amounts of caffeine will have an effect on your sleep. If you are having trouble staying awake, try some physical activity. Do a few push-ups, sit-ups, stretch, jog around the room, jumping jacks, bergpies, etc.—I think you understand.
8. Go to bed and wake-up at the same time every day. Consistency here is the key. The human body/mind likes consistency. Getting use to sleeping and waking at the same time daily helps create a rhythm and helps you achieve deep sleep on a more regular basis.
9. Get 8-9 hours of sleep daily. I know this is very tough for many of us, but studies still show that this is optimal. 9 hours is more preferred for teenagers or college athletes, while 8 hours is preferred for adults. If you cannot get 8-9 hours of sleep, refer to Tip #10.
10. Schedule your sleep in 90 minute intervals to help promote getting deep sleep. If you know you can only get between 4 and 5 hours of sleep on a given night, set your alarm for 4.5 hours. Waking up at the end of a sleep cycle (90min) will help you feel refreshed. Waking up in the middle or at the beginning will make you feel more sleep deprived and tired throughout the day.

Much has been written over the years regarding sleep studies and sports recovery. Taking advantage of your sleep as a recovery tool is a great way to help optimize your athletic performance. For more information about sleep and performance, please contact me to schedule an educational session. You can reach me at 412.787.5070 or [jhoy@finishfirstsports.com](mailto:jhoy@finishfirstsports.com).