

Sleep Fasting



You should try a sleep fast. Seriously. It's one of the best things you could possibly do for your health. I know what you're thinking: Why would a sleep fast be good for my health? Well, it's been hard to come up with a name for what I really mean (see end of article), but you'll soon understand what I'm getting at.

You've heard of juice fasting, where a person drinks nothing but fresh juices for a time? It's not that they're fasting from juice, but that they're fasting from solid foods and junk and make the decision to fill their bodies with whole food juices. I used to do a week long juice fast every year. It was as much for soul cleansing as it was for body cleansing, but then I decided to have a baby and

had to do away with my yearly juice-fasting-ritual for a time while I was pregnant and nursing. I wondered what I could do in place of it. As I thought about it, I kept thinking about how tired I was, and then it came to me: A Sleep Fast! It sounded like the best thing in the world, a week of sleeping as much as possible? Yes. I was in.

As most of you know, I'm a single mom, so figuring out the logistics wasn't easy. I tried to plan it for weeks and then decided that there was no time like the present. I still had a dog, a baby, some teenagers, and four businesses to run, but by golly, I was going for it!

My simple plan went like this:

1. Go to bed one hour earlier
2. Sleep in as much as possible
3. Take 1-2 naps every day

Before I tell you how it went, let me tell you a few things about sleep.

A few years ago, the National Sleep Foundation revised the hours of sleep healthy humans should be getting. I heard through rumor that it had been changed to 7-9 hours a night for healthy adults and it made me feel very validated since nine hours seems to be what works very best for me (though I never get that much!). I learned recently, though, that the guidelines have been 7-9 hours a night (and up to 10 hours a night) for healthy adults for

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health

Sleep Fasting

quite some time, and that the hours were only revised for other age groups. I was surprised by this, since I had always heard that eight hours was sufficient.

I was further interested (but not surprised) to learn that women have more sleep problems than men, including insomnia, trouble falling asleep, and issues with things like restless leg syndrome. The National Sleep Foundation had this to say about the implications of sleep issues and why women may have a more difficult time with sleep:

Sleep in America poll of all adults revealed that women are more likely than men to have difficulty falling and staying asleep and to experience more daytime sleepiness at least a few nights/days a week. Research has shown that too little sleep results in daytime sleepiness, increased accidents, problems concentrating, poor performance on the job and in school, and possibly, increased sickness and weight gain.

Getting the right amount of sleep is vital, but just as important is the quality of your sleep. Biological conditions unique to women, like the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and menopause, can affect how well a woman sleeps. This is because the changing levels of hormones that a woman experiences throughout the month and over her lifetime, like estrogen and progesterone, have an impact on sleep. Understanding the effects of these

hormones, environmental factors and lifestyle habits can help women enjoy a good night's sleep.

I also read about a concept called, *sleep debt*, that is, just as it sounds, the amount of debt you incur in your sleep bank when you don't get enough sleep. It sounds terrible. Who likes to have debt of any kind! What I found promising, though, was that you can "pay off" sleep debt by taking a little extra time each day to devote to sleeping. As I thought about this, I realized that if a person went to bed just 15 minutes early, took a 30 minute nap, and slept in just 15 minutes later per day, she could have "earned" an **entire night** of sleep "credit" at the end of just one week!

So how did my sleep fast go? Well, I kept notes so you understand that I realize how daunting this might seem to someone who has a busy busy life:

Day One:

no sleeping in today

1:00pm tried for a nap, baby and dog interruptions, no sleeping

1:55pm tried for a nap again, slept for 27 minutes, could have slept longer but baby was too sad and teenage brother (babysitter) had to bring her to me.

10:27pm in bed nursing baby to sleep

10:40pm baby wide awake

11:10pm baby finally falls asleep, I sleep, still 35 minutes earlier than normal

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health

Sleep Fasting

Day Two:

8:04am baby woke me up so even though I had planned an extra hour, it didn't work out

5:10pm no nap today, tried to rest now, baby sad and needs me, baby calms down, I fall asleep

5:40pm sound asleep but I forgot to turn my ringer off and someone texts me, jolted from sleep but slept 30 minutes

10:45pm in bed, 60 minutes earlier than normal

Day Three:

9:00am woke up! slept in! 60 minutes extra

2:10pm dozed, but not really slept, for 30 minutes

11:45pm in bed, finally, after working on edits for a deadline on cooking shows, exhausted

I'll spare you the rest of the week. Needless to say, like you might, I had a lot of interruptions and a lot of things that didn't allow me to get as much sleep as I wanted. That said, I was still able to put a good 6 hours of sleep toward my sleep debt! I realized that those extra minutes really do add up to quite a bit of sleep in the long run!

If you want to try a sleep fast, and I sure hope you will, here are a 5 things I learned and will do differently next time:

1. If at all possible, line up a *real* babysitter for babies, kids, aging parents (and animals) who can't take care of themselves. I realize that this can be a bit of a chore, but you deserve it. Trade with a friend or pay someone if you have the means.

2. Make sure to wind down earlier than normal by taking a hot bath, watching your shows, reading your books, etc. Whatever it is you do before bed to calm yourself, do it earlier. I found myself lying there with my eyes open when I went to bed earlier, because my body wasn't used to it and still needed to come down from the hustle and bustle of the day.

3. DO NOT watch TV or any other device to fall asleep. Begin to train your body to go to sleep without having to use high energy entertainment.

4. When people are busy mowing lawns or playing outside in the daytime, or teenagers and / or partners are still up at night, it can make it difficult to fall asleep, using a sound machine or fan to block out the noise that is otherwise present during nap times and earlier bedtimes is a must.

5. Don't drink caffeine or eat or drink sugary things before bed. If you can, avoid caffeine altogether during your week of sleep fasting.

If you can't accommodate a sleep fast just yet, do a mini one! Try getting to bed 10-15 minutes early every night, you'll have sleep equivalent to a long Sunday nap, at the very least.

Now that you know what a sleep fast is, it probably makes perfect sense why I settled on that name. I'm betting, however, that you're going to have a bit

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health

Sleep Fasting

of a difficult time explaining it to your friends and family so I decided to list the names I came up with prior to, "Sleep Fast" so you could use them if you need to: *Sleep Festival, Snooze Fest, Carnaval de Sommeil, Siesta Fiesta, Snore Jamboree, Somno Festivus...* I'll stop there.

Happy Sleeping!

author: melissa chappell

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health