

# Build Immunity with Better Sleep

by Channing Dallstream



There's nothing like a good night's sleep to start the day right. But getting the quality sleep our bodies need isn't always easy. After tossing and turning all night we may crave something to push us through the day, but what's happening inside your body can't be helped by a cup o' joe. Uninterrupted sleep allows your body to repair itself after the day's events and stressors have taken their toll. Even a modest loss of sleep reduces the body's immune responses. And if you're not getting "slow wave" sleep that is linked to the body's ability to repair itself, what exactly are you inviting in during the cold and flu season?

Your immune system rebuilds itself during deep, non-REM (NREM) or slow wave, sleep. A national sleep study found that more people are consistently sleeping less than six hours a night even though experts recommend seven to nine hours.<sup>1</sup> Add in the fact that sleep difficulties visit 75% of us at least a few nights per week, and more frequently if you're a woman. Insomnia can weaken the immune system, and the body's natural killer immune cells stop functioning as sleep deprivation increases. Less sleep means less resistance to colds, flu and respiratory tract infections.<sup>2</sup>

The National Institutes of Health's research supports the immunity and sleep connection. "Neurons that control sleep interact closely with the immune system. As anyone who has had the flu knows, infectious diseases tend to make us feel sleepy. This probably happens because cytokines, chemicals our immune systems produce while fighting an infection, are powerful sleep-inducing chemicals. And sleep may help the body conserve energy and other resources that the immune system needs to mount an attack."<sup>3</sup> What that translates to is that if you're not sleeping before you get sick, your body will 'text message' you to when you do get sick!

It's not only the quantity of sleep you are getting that matters, quality counts, too. A 2009 study concluded poorer sleep efficiency and shorter sleep duration in the weeks before exposure to the common cold were associated with lower resistance to illness. The 14-day study included more than 150 healthy men and women ranging in age from 21 to 55. Participants with less than seven hours of sleep were almost three times "more likely to develop a cold than those with eight hours or more of sleep."<sup>4</sup> Sleep efficiency was also graded: participants with less than 92% efficiency were five times more likely to develop a cold than those with 98% or more efficiency.



## SLEEP *Set the Mood*

- ★ Develop a bedtime ritual
- ★ Try a cup of calming tea an hour before bedtime
- ★ Listen to relaxing sounds or music
- ★ Create a cool, quiet bedroom environment
- ★ Limit light with opaque curtains and hide illuminated clocks
- ★ Decorate with cool colors like blues and greens
- ★ Increase serotonin & melatonin with 5-HTP
- ★ Invest in a good mattress and quality bedding



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“Sleep will not cure all ailments”, says Barry Krakow M.D., author of *Sound Sleep, Sound Mind*, “but it is a fundamental part of nearly every aspect of your health.”<sup>5</sup> Sleeplessness often accompanies other health issues. In her article for *Health Points*, naturopath Kelly Hannigan points out that more than 75% of fibromyalgia (FMS) and chronic fatigue (ME/CFS) patients complain of poor sleep (Buchwald et al. 1994), which contributes to FMS and myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME)/CFS symptoms. Hannigan explains that those with FMS and ME/CFS spend more time in the light and early stages of sleep and do not progress to the deeper, stage-4 restorative sleep.<sup>6</sup>



The good news is you have time to renovate your sleep habits, increase your NREM sleep, and make a plan to avoid illness. Melatonin is an effective hormone therapy that protects and improves immune function. It enhances the production of T-helper cells that are necessary to

identify, among other things, viruses and bacteria.<sup>7</sup> During NREM sleep serotonin makes melatonin and stores it in the pineal gland to be released at night. Human growth hormone is also made during slow-wave sleep and this hormone is connected to the body's ability to repair itself.

For improving your sleep quality, Michael Murray, N.D., recommends taking 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP). “In my view, 5-HTP provides the quickest, most effective, and most consistent overall results.” He continues that a 100-300 mg dose of 5-HTP about 40 minutes before bed should enhance the body's own natural cycle of melatonin production and release without causing daytime sleepiness. Clinical studies show 5-HTP's ability to improve sleep quality by increasing the time spent in both REM and NREM sleep without increasing total sleep time.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Murray notes that some find it helpful to add a “sleepy herb”, such as valerian root extract, California poppy, hops, lemon balm or passionflower, to their nighttime ritual. Many herbs work only when they contain the active ingredient documented by research (i.e. 0.8% valerenic acid from the root) so make sure you read the label. For most, a natural herbal sleep enhancer helps them fall asleep, and the 5-HTP helps them stay asleep.

Draw up a plan to avoid getting sick this season. Instead of stocking the medicine cabinet with cold and flu remedies, focus on sleep quality improvement, reinforce your immune system and plan to stay well. You can't avoid every germ out there, but you can build up your immune system with better sleep.

## References

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*Channing Dallstream is an avid biker and organic gardener when Arizona's temperatures cooperate, and looks forward to contributing future articles to Health Points.*

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**Get With The Program**  
**SLEEP**  
5-HTP 50 – 300 mg  
Valerian Rest ES™  
**MORE HELPERS**  
Fibro-Care Cal™  
Melatonin TR (Time Release)  
St. John's Wort (0.3% hypericin)

*Note: 5-HTP and valerian may cause alertness in a few people. If this occurs, take it during the day. Combining 5-HTP and St. John's Wort with SSRIs may result in a temporary state of excess sleepiness called serotonin syndrome. Overall, the safety and effectiveness of natural sleep substances are well documented.*