

# AVWC January 2016 Newsletter

## January 2016 Edition

Dear <<First Name>>,

Welcome to the new Alpine Valley Wellness Center newsletter! We hope you find it useful and interesting. If you have any feedback about it, we would love to hear it. Please note that, in order to see the pictures, you may have to allow that in your email.

We wanted to let you know that Dr. Piscopo is now offering the widely acclaimed **HeartMath** program exclusively for our patients. The HeartMath program empowers individuals, families, and organizations to enhance their life experiences using tools that enable them to decrease stress, increase their effectiveness, and better access their intuitive insight and creative intelligence. It is particularly helpful for dealing with overwhelm, high stress, anxiety, PTSD, mild mood disorders, and insomnia. For more information, please see: <https://www.heartmath.org/research/>

In Health,  
AVWC staff

## Sleep: Essential for Mind-Body Health



Adults and children alike are spending more time awake late at night to study, work, or have fun. All those late nights may be slowly killing us. More than 20 years of research shows us that sleep is vitally important to physical and mental health.

Most of what we know about sleep and health comes from studies of what happens to the mind and body when we don't sleep enough, or at all. In animal and human studies, living without sleep for even a few months resulted in death. Sleeping fewer than 8 hours a night on a regular basis is associated with increased risk for diabetes, heart disease and stroke, depression, colds and flu, and obesity.

### **While We Are Sleeping...**

Sleep affects brain chemistry and has an important role in the functioning of the nervous, immune and

endocrine systems. During sleep we develop and reinforce neural pathways involved in memory, learning, and emotion. New research suggests sleep helps flush toxins from the brain.

While we are sleeping, the body manufactures hormones that repair damage caused by stress and the environment in which we work and play. Growth hormone cleanses the liver, builds muscle, breaks down fat, and helps normalize blood sugar. We also produce hormones that help fight infections. If we aren't getting sufficient sleep, we get sick more often and take longer to recover. Lack of sleep increases inflammation, which has been linked to heart disease and stroke.

Skimping on shut-eye is linked with obesity in adults and children. Lack of sleep interferes with the levels of ghrelin and leptin, metabolic hormones that signal when you're hungry and when you're full.

The amount of sleep you need varies based on age, activity level, quality of sleep, and genetics (e.g., some of us really are night owls). Infants typically require 14-15 hours of sleep per 24-hour period; young children about 12 hours; teens about 9 hours, and most adults 7-9 hours. A general rule of thumb for determining your sleep requirement: If you do not wake feeling refreshed, you may not be getting enough sleep.

### **Tips For A Good Night's Sleep**

1. **In the sack for sleep and sex only.** Regular sex can improve sleep quality so don't use your time between the sheets to deal with daily hassles—take that outside of the bedroom (or record in a journal). If you don't feel sleepy, leave the room and do something relaxing until you feel drowsy, (see our Natural Therapies for Sound Sleep in this newsletter). Then, go back to bed.
2. **Set a sleep schedule.** This includes a soothing pre-sleep routine, such as a warm bath, reading, or gentle stretching. Go to bed and wake at the same time each day. This entrains your body rhythms, making it easier to fall asleep. If you need a nap, get it in before 4:00 PM; limit to 20 - 30 minutes.
3. **Surround yourself with cave-like ambiance.** A sleeping space should be quiet, dark, and cool (between 60-72°). If you do shift-work, use blackout shades or an eye mask. Remove electronic devices, computers and TVs from your room. Research shows that use of digital devices within an hour of bedtime has a negative effect on sleep quality.
4. **Let the light in early and exercise regularly.** Natural light helps regulate hormones that promote ideal sleep-wake patterns. Open the curtains as early as possible and get outdoors during the day. Also, exercise during the day or early evening makes it easier to fall asleep and increases the amount of deep sleep obtained.
5. **Eat a Light, Last Meal of the Day.** A light dinner eaten 2-3 hours before sleep is ideal. A full stomach interferes with sleep as the body works at digestion. Steer clear of spicy or fatty foods that can cause heartburn. If you need a bedtime snack, combine a carbohydrate and protein, such as almond butter on toast, Greek yogurt with sugar-free granola, or cheese and crackers.
6. **Liquid and Other Libations.** Coffee and tea have health benefits, and work best taken in moderation early in the day. Avoid products containing sugar, nicotine, or caffeine (later in the day or if it is too stimulating for you) as their effects can last several hours.

7. **Address the Pain.** One of the root causes for sleep disturbance is chronic pain, certainly physical but emotional or mental anguish are also of concern here. Effective pain management techniques can help here. If you need assistance, Dr. Piscopo has 15 years of experience successfully helping people to overcome their pain issues.

### **Are You Sleep Deprived?**

You don't have to pull "all-nighters" to become sleep deprived. A sleep debt of just 1-2 hours a few nights a week can affect your health and performance. To become fully well-rested and regain energy after a sleep debt, get an extra hour of sleep each night for one week.

If you experience any of the following the signs of sleep deprivation, talk to Dr. Thomas or Dr. Piscopo about customizing a sleep program for you to help your sleep back on track.

- Daytime drowsiness; fatigue
- Poor memory; difficulty concentrating
- Changes in appetite
- Difficulty dealing with stress
- Irritability
- Muscle tension; impaired vision
- Increase in accidents or clumsiness

### **Food for Thought. . .**

*"Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together."*

- Thomas Dekker

## **The Power of Sweet Potato**



Sweet Potato is a powerhouse of nutrition. In addition, Chinese Medicine's seasonal eating philosophy support the liberal use of this tasty root vegetable during the winter months. This vibrant orange tuber is rich in vitamins, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory nutrients, and blood sugar-regulating nutrients. The antioxidant Beta-carotene, which gives Sweet Potato its orange flesh, is necessary for your body to produce Vitamin A. We need vitamin A for eye health, for a strong immune system, and for healthy skin. One medium Sweet Potato provides 100% of your daily needs for Vitamin A, as well as a healthy dose of vitamin C, several of the B vitamins, potassium, calcium, iron, magnesium, zinc, and

vitamin E.

Some research has shown that, as antioxidants from Sweet Potato (called cyanidins and peonidins) and other phytonutrients pass through the digestive tract, they act in ways that may lower the health risk posed by heavy metals. Scientists are also studying the anti-inflammatory nutrients (anthocyanin) contained in purple Sweet Potatoes, which may provide protection against certain types of cancer. Sweet Potatoes also have a fascinating ability to potentially improve blood sugar regulation. Researchers are interested in determining what effect this may have on Type-2 Diabetes. High in fiber, including Sweet Potato in your diet can promote regularity of the bowels and healthy digestive function.

You can enjoy Sweet Potato as a main course, side dish, in soups, or in desserts. When shopping for these versatile veggies, remember that Yams are not the same as Sweet Potatoes. The two are not in the same “food family” and each has a different nutrient profile. Yams are usually imported from Africa or Asia, whereas the Sweet Potato is grown abundantly in the U.S. Finally, Sweet Potato color, both flesh and skin, can range from white to yellow-orange to brown or purple. There also are “firm” or “soft” varieties, which can make a difference in your cooking.

## Good Old Fashioned Baked Sweet Potatoes



Sweet Potatoes are a perfect food not only for your holiday meals, they also make for a tasty snack or to accompany a hearty soup or salad at lunchtime.

### Ingredients:

- 4 large sweet potatoes, scrubbed
- Coconut oil for brushing
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Butter or Earth Balance™ to taste

### Preparation Instructions

1. Heat oven to 450 degrees.
2. Brush potatoes with coconut oil and place potatoes in a glass cooking dish with lid.
3. Cover and cook in hot oven for 40 minutes or until easily pierced with a fork.
4. Remove from oven and serve hot.

5. Season with salt, pepper and butter to taste.

## Calcium Essential for Strong Bones, Sound Sleep



Did you know that Calcium, the most abundant mineral in the human body, is not only essential for strong bones, it also supports healthy functioning of the cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and nervous systems? Research shows a relationship between Calcium intake and risk for heart disease, colorectal cancer, kidney stones, PMS, and managing a healthy weight. When it comes to sound sleep, insufficient dietary Calcium has been associated with insomnia. Calcium is instrumental in the way our brains cycle through the stages of sleep and in the ability to generate brain chemicals, including tryptophan, associated with deep sleep.

The best way to get calcium is through whole foods. Dairy products are abundant in the mineral in a form that's easy for most people to digest. Vegans sources of this mineral include almonds, dark leafy greens, and tofu. However, figuring out how much calcium you're actually getting from veggies is tricky. If a vegetable contains oxalic or phytic acid, then the calcium may be poorly absorbed because of the acids. For example, 1 c. of frozen spinach contains nearly as much calcium as 1 c. of milk, but only a tenth as much is absorbed because of the oxalic acid.

The National Institutes of Health note that Calcium carbonate is more commonly available and is both inexpensive and convenient. Due to its dependence on stomach acid for absorption, calcium carbonate is absorbed most efficiently when taken with food, whereas calcium citrate is absorbed equally well when taken with or without food. Calcium citrate is also useful for people with achlorhydria, inflammatory bowel disease, or absorption disorders. For a healthy adult, the recommended intake for a Calcium is 1,000 – 2,000 mg daily, depending on health status and lifestyle habits including exercise.

There are many factors and forms of calcium supplements (e.g., carbonate, citrate), that affect how well the body absorbs the mineral. Also, calcium supplements can interact with other medications. Too much calcium can stress other bodily systems, leading to health problems, and there has been some controversy in the medical literature about the impact of high calcium supplementation and cardiovascular health. For these reasons, consult with Dr. Thomas or Dr. Piscopo as to which type and dosage of calcium is best for you.

## Soothing Herbs for Restful Sleep

*Lavender (Lavendula species), Chamomile (Matricaria recutita), Oats (Avena sativa)*



Three herbs well known for calming effects are Lavender, Chamomile and Oats. Perhaps, not quite as well known as the first two herbs, *Avena sativa* (Oats Milky Seed or Oatstraw) is the grain\* source of oatmeal. The entire plant is abundant in minerals and trace nutrients, in particular the B-vitamins, calcium, and magnesium, which help soothe and strengthen the nervous system. As an herbal remedy, oats can ease the effects of stress, anxiety or exhaustion and resolve sleeplessness. Oats contain the amino acid tryptophan, which research shows promotes sleep. In fact, Scottish folks suggest a bowl of oatmeal before bedtime to ensure restful sleep!

Of its many medicinal uses, lavender is known worldwide as an herbal “rescue-remedy” for reducing stress, anxiety and tension. Its strong, relaxation-inducing scent is used in massage therapy lotions, candles, bath salts, tinctures and essential oils. As one of the few essential oils that can be applied directly to the skin, a dab of lavender on the inside of your wrist can help soothe a stressful moment. Lavender is also used in teas, often paired with chamomile. If you aren’t a tea-drinker, dried lavender can be added to a sachet and placed beneath your pillow to help induce sleep.

Chamomile has been used for centuries as an herbal remedy for easing stress and insomnia. Today, these uses continue and we also have good clinical evidence for the safe use of chamomile preparations to help reduce inflammation, promote more restful sleep, ease colic and digestive upset, and facilitate wound healing when used in a cream. While chamomile seems to reduce the effects of anxiety, which can contribute to sleeplessness, more research is necessary to demonstrate the specific properties of chamomile that contribute to its effects.

Since there are many different ways to prepare these herbs, and some people can be allergic to certain herbs, do check with Dr. Thomas or Dr. Piscopo for the best approach to help you relax and get a good night’s sleep.

\*If you have sensitivity to gluten, be sure to use an oat product produced using gluten-free manufacturing practices.

## Natural Therapies for a Good Night's Sleep



Before your head sinks into the pillow at bedtime, there are some very simple things you can do to prepare mind and body for a night of deeply restful sleep. The evening hours are a time when the busyness of your day should begin to wind down. It's important to create a bedtime ritual that will help tame the thoughts that may still be racing through your mind and which can prevent you from falling or staying asleep throughout the night.

In addition to the lifestyle tips for better sleep that are described in this month's feature article, try adding some of the following naturopathic and holistic approaches to your evening routine.

- Enjoy a warm bath including Epsom salts and/or lavender oil.
- Listen to the relaxing sounds of ocean waves, classical music, or chimes. There are specialized acoustic recordings that are orchestrated to affect specific brain wave patterns for relaxation or sleep.
- A guided recording of progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing exercises, restorative yoga poses, can help the body create the 'relaxation response'.
- Herbs and other botanical or aromatherapy treatments are useful for calming down after a stressful day. In addition to the herbs discussed in this month's newsletter, you might want to ask your physician about teas, tinctures or capsule preparations of valerian, skullcap, passionflower, or lemon balm.
- Try mindfulness practice, breath work, meditation, or prayer, beginning with just 10 minutes a day. Meditation has numerous health benefits and recent studies show it can significantly affect quality of sleep. Dr. Piscopo has extensive training in this area and can assist in setting up a customize program for you.