

# Commentary... The magic elixir

By Mitchell Luftig  
Columnist

I am going to tell you about a magic elixir that if taken regularly will:

1. Reduce the buildup of toxins in your brain.
2. Control inflammation, which may reduce the likelihood of developing certain cancers.
3. Boost your immune system.
4. Restore energy and vitality.
5. Promote creative problem-solving.
6. Enhance concentration and improve memory.
7. Support better regulation of your emotions.
8. Help to process painful emotions and experiences.

The magic elixir in question is a few weeks of good sleep. (“Why Do We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams,” by Matthew Walker).

In our fast-paced society this magic elixir is often underutilized. There are several reasons why we may get suboptimal sleep:

- Working long hours to complete projects.
- Shift work/frequent travel with jet lag.
- Staying up late to hang out with friends.
- Viewing sleep as time wasted (“I’ll have plenty of time to sleep when I’m dead.”)
- Noisy sleep environments and excess artificial light in modern cities.
- Round-the-clock entertainment.

When we miss weeks of good sleep, we lose out on the benefits that sleep confers on us. And when we try to make up for lost sleep through extensive napping or sleeping late on weekends we may further disrupt our sleep patterns.

Not getting sufficient sleep can be harmful to your health:

Research is demonstrating a connection between poor sleep and “hypertension, obesity and type-2 diabetes, impaired immune functioning, cardiovascular disease and arrhythmias, mood disorders, neurodegenerative disorders, and dementia, and even loneliness.”

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6281147/>)

### The timing of sleep

According to the National Sleep Foundation’s website, “Your urge to sleep is guided by two factors: your sleep drive and your circadian rhythm. Sleep drive refers to a homeostatic system in your brain which makes you feel sleepy. With every hour that you are awake, your sleep drive gets stronger. The sleep/wake circadian rhythm is your body’s internal system that triggers both feelings of sleepiness that send you to bed and feelings of alertness that tell you it’s time to get up.”

Excessive consumption of caffeine (more than two to three cups of coffee per day) disrupts the sleep drive because it blocks the uptake of adenosine, a chemical that signals the body that it’s time to become drowsy to rebuild energy reserves. Excess adenosine makes us feel groggy the next morning. Loading up on caffeine to compensate for morning grogginess perpetuates poor sleep, and can make us feel tired all day.

Blue light emitted by computers and smart phones interrupts the circadian rhythm by fooling the brain into thinking that it’s time to wake up, rather than priming the brain for sleep by melatonin release.

### How we sleep

We sleep in 90-minute cycles. During the first half of the night the 90-minute cycles are comprised of lots of deep sleep and very little REM sleep. During the second half of the night, REM sleep dominates the sleep cycle. Both are critical to our well-being.

According to Matthew Walker, we need deep sleep before we learn something new so we can empty out our short-term memory cache. Our brain is now primed to receive new information.

“But we’ve also learned that you need sleep after learning to then take those freshly minted memories in the brain and cement them and solidify them into the neural architecture of the brain.”

“But what dream sleep does by interconnecting them is it shifts us from knowledge, which is the individual facts, to wisdom, which is knowing what it all means when you fit it together.”

(<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/964209001>)

### Taking full advantage of the magic elixir of sleep

- Set a schedule — go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day but no later than

a few hours before going to bed.

- Avoid caffeine and nicotine late in the day and alcoholic drinks before bed.

- Create a room for sleep — avoid bright lights and loud sounds, keep the room at a comfortable temperature (about 65° F), and don’t watch TV or have a computer in your bedroom.

- Expose yourself to sunlight as soon as you wake up — this helps to keep melatonin levels in sync with your circadian rhythm.

- Don’t lie in bed awake. If you can’t get to sleep, do something else, like reading or listening to music, until you feel tired.

- See a doctor if you have a problem sleeping or if you feel unusually tired during the day. Most sleep disorders can be treated effectively.

Detailed information about the brain’s role in sleep and wakefulness can be found at <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Understanding-Sleep>.

# Oregon to get \$262M in wildfire recovery funds

SALEM (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service in Oregon will receive more than \$262 million in federal disaster funding to help with wildfire recovery.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports the money is part of a \$1.1 billion disaster assistance bill that passed last year to help regions across the country recover from a variety of natural disasters over the last three years.

Oregon’s Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, both Democrats, supported the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act of 2021, which passed in September with more than a billion dollars in funding for recovery efforts after wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters.

More than a million acres of land across Oregon burned in Labor Day 2020 wildfires, calling attention to the need.

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