

“WHERE DO YOU go to my lovely, when you are alone in your bed? Tell me the thoughts that surround you, I want to look inside your head...” Peter Sarstedt had a romantic intention when he wrote these words for his hit pop melody in 1969. But little did he know, the same lyrics would come to haunt our modern lifestyle. The mundane, everyday chatter of the mind amplifies into the night when we are tossing and turning at 3am. So, as a distraction, we find ourselves reaching for our phones, sighing in disbelief, nudging our partner, or even resorting to the TV to watch our favourite comedy to cheer us up.

It’s moments like this that even the fairy-tale curse of 100 years of sleep starts to seem like an interesting, and perhaps enticing, concept. Maybe Charles Perrault was onto something when he wrote *The Sleeping Beauty*? Was his protagonist sleep deprived as well? Or was she trying to tell us something, back in 1697, by blaming the entire situation on an evil fairy? More immediately, have we made our nonstop life, our own villain?

Chronic sleep deprivation is defined as getting fewer than six hours of shut-eye a night, and this insufficient sleep has become a public health epidemic. The lack of sleep is often linked to a host of illnesses, such as obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, mental anxiety, lowered immunity, diabetes, and neurological problems. However, our generation of women considers sleep as a perfectly acceptable waste of time. We often take pride in not getting enough sleep and then demand an instant cure in a caffeinated disguise. “Not getting enough sleep and then running around the next morning in search of

coffee has become a trend. Women wonder why they need to sleep when they can be doing something way more exciting,” reveals Dr Karina Stewart, Co-Founder of Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa in Koh Samui. The time between the sheets is deemed so precious because this is when our brain actively does the job of a mental janitor – it files away short-term and long-term memories, divides and repairs the cells in the body, and clears itself of all the junk that has been collected over the course of a day. Dr Stewart explains, “When we don’t get enough sleep, our brain cells are not able to detoxify efficiently, so our capacity to function on every level is impacted. We might feel alright and have great reflexes, but the mind is in strong denial.”

The University of Wisconsin conducted a study on 1.1 million people in 2002 and concluded that those with a higher body mass index were more likely to sleep less than seven to eight hours a night. Author David K Randall also wrote in his 2012 book, *Dreamland: Adventures in the Strange Science of Sleep*, “Relationships, creativity, memories – all that makes us who we are – depends on the hours we spend each night with our heads on the pillow.” While our mind and body are evidently affected by lack of sleep, Dr Stewart, who also runs a Sleep Enhancement Programme on the Thai island, is waving red flags for how a low-quality sleep



# About last night

Sleep scientists have been saying it for years: a low-quality sleep is a

hindrance to the body and mind. So why are we still wearing our lack of sleep like a badge of honour?

Clock off eight hours of transformative sleep a night and stop treating time between the sheets like a luxury

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is particularly fatal to women and their fertility. “When we don’t get a good night’s rest, our adrenal glands are stimulated to produce more cortisol – and that’s our stress hormone. Adrenal glands also are very important in keeping our hormones in balance,” Dr Stewart adds. “In women, our hormonal balance system fluctuates every 28 to 30 days. When we start fatiguing, the adrenal glands, because they are so busy producing the cortisol as we refuse to sleep, are inadvertently affecting our other hormones and their balance as well.”



Sleep isn’t just to remember what we did yesterday, it is much more complex than that. Think of the mind as a fish tank – if we don’t clear the fish tank of its algae and toxins, then the fish inside will eventually die. In humans, a good night’s sleep is that life-saving filter. Dr Stewart advocates eight solid hours of pillow time for woman between the age of 25-40, and from 10pm to 6am. Although when the time comes to wake up, if we are not under extreme exhaustion, Dr Stewart believes the body will involuntarily catch the sleep cycle and wake us up without the need for an alarm clock. “Late nights out, unhealthy diets and travelling can send the body into thinking that it’s permanently in jetlag mode, so an alarm clock – while not recommended – becomes necessary.” However, this snooze option is only valid if we let the mind go through its round-the-clock cleanse as we happily drift off into Peter Sarstedt’s perfect dream world. ●

## FIVE RITUALS TO BOOST YOUR SLEEP

**1** Avoid stimulants like coffee, tea or carbonated drinks, as they will poke the nervous system. Dr Stewart says it takes six hours for the body to eliminate 50 per cent of the caffeine it ingests. “An innocent cup of coffee mid-afternoon needs to be consumed with more mindfulness,” she recommends.

**2** Create a cool room temperature in the bedroom and keep it under 21 degrees celsius, suggests Dr Stewart, because the body sleeps better and deeper when the room is cool.

**3** Even a chink of light can disturb the body from producing melatonin, the sleep hormone. Avoid computers, iPhones, iPads and other backlit technology for two hours before bedtime. Their electronic stimulation can slow down the brain from starting the detoxification process and keep it active for hours into the night.

**4** A traditional Chinese medicine ritual that works like magic is soaking the feet in warm water with lavender oil for 15 minutes before bed. Also, drinking a cup of warm herbal tea will doubly enhance the effect of the foot soak.

**5** If difficulty in breathing is keeping you awake, then a deviated septum might be the culprit. This can be fixed and can make a huge difference in your quality of sleep.