Opening Thoughts on Sleep and Journaling

What you have to remember about thoughts and sleep is that anything that you've learned that's coming to your brain during the day needs to be processed and consolidated during sleep, and it's going to happen.

So if you want all those negative things to not intrude and infiltrate your mind, you need to process them while you're awake. So I don't suggest doing that.

My journaling at night before bed, for me, I'm a list taker. I'm always like, oh, am I going to forget this to get this tomorrow or this meeting? So part of my journaling is my to-do list.

Getting out the negative stuff earlier in the day, so you get it out, but it's not what you're thinking about when you're going to sleep. With children, I always say you have to schedule a talk time with kids, because as a dad, you know this, right?

They don't tell you anything bad that happened during the day, and you go to tuck them in at night, and all of a sudden it's, my teacher said this, and my friend did this, and I have a project tomorrow, and all this, right?

That's good. You have to give them time and you don't want to ignore it, but you don't want to feed into that right before bed. This is Doctor Talks. Real talk from real doctors on the issues that matter to you most.

Hey there, I'm Dr. Isaac Jones. I'm here with Dr. Whitney Robyn, who is a sleep expert. And she's not just a theoretical sleep expert. She's a sleep expert that is actually boots on the ground, clinically proven to create systems and strategies that will help you get deeper, more rejuvenating sleep.

So Dr. Whitney, thank you so much for being here with us. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here. Of course. Now, I would love to know, you know, the first question, which is like, what got you into this in the first place, into health, into longevity?

And what's kind of created this possession that you have over sleep optimization? Yeah, I love this question because it's the first time I always get to talk right about my children, but also a big event that happened that we all experienced with 9-11.

So, interestingly enough, I found out on 9-11 that I was pregnant with my first child. and I was living in New York City on that day. And the company that I was working for was a very large nonprofit, and they had offered me something during maternity leave, which was called FlexTime.

Now we know it as hybrid working, but back then in 2001, nobody really did that kind of work.

Dr. Whitney Robyn's Path Into Sleep Science

And I was very excited to take that opportunity because I was a new mom. However, after 9-11, the CEO of our company went over to the Red Cross to help with the 9-11 relief efforts.

And they called me while I was on leave and they said, unfortunately, we're restructuring and you have to come back five days in the office or nothing.

And I looked at my little newborn son and I said, okay, I think I'm going to choose nothing. And I found myself as a stay-at-home mom, which wasn't the plan, and a child who didn't sleep.

And that literally changed everything for me. And 20 years later, here I am still working in the field of sleep, helping

people of all ages to get better sleep.

Oh my gosh, that's amazing. Well, it's like sometimes challenges end up being blessings in a way, right? Like that helped us become, you know, experts in our field in certain ways.

And tell me like, what were some of the challenges or obstacles or setbacks in your journey that you did and how did you get through, that you had, and how did you get through those?

Yeah, it's interesting. The field of sleep has changed so much. So this might resonate with other people in the field of sleep if they're listening. I started doing this 20 years ago, and there were just a handful of us really working, like you said, boots on the ground, helping people sleep.

And I really focus then on helping moms and dads of children sleep because I had my own children at the time too. And years later, some other sleep professionals started this online certification training to become what they call like pediatric sleep consultants.

I'm sure you've heard of that. You're a parent of four kids. And it just became something that every mom in the street was getting this online certification and the field became inundated.

So it went from a few of us to a lot of us. And they said, okay, you know, entrepreneur now, what can I do to do something a little different than everybody else is doing?

My kids were a little bit older and I have this part of my brain that's a creative brain that not many psychologists have. What I realized is there are so many books out there for parents to teach their kids to sleep, but nobody was talking directly to the children.

And so before I was working as a psychologist, I was creating sleep games and books for teachers and therapists. So I kind of had a little bit of experience in the publishing world.

So I wrote a couple of children's books about the importance of sleep. First one being called Devin and Evan's Sleep from Eight to Seven. It's a very colorful book and it rhymes and it uses real life situations that kids experience to explain to them why sleep is so important on their level.

And it was a big success. So I wrote a follow-up book. called Devin and Evan play Fortnite till 11 because at that time it was the Fortnite craze and I happened to have caught my own kids who were great sleepers playing Fortnite when they should have been sleeping.

So I took the opportunity to have a challenge, which is, okay, what else can I do with my experience working with kids? And I wrote these children's books.

I started going into schools. and reading them to the kids and I could not believe how excited they got and how much they wanted to tell me how badly they were all sleeping and the teachers couldn't.

Oh really? Yeah. The children were sleeping bad? Is that something that you're hearing as well like in… 100%. I mean in like a third grade class you'd say how many of you have a bedtime and no children would raise their hands?

And you'd say, well, how many of you have trouble falling asleep? And all their little hands would go up. And they just wanted to ask, how do I get better sleep?

And my parents keep the lights on at night when I'm trying to sleep in their lab. I heard so many great, interesting stories. And the teacher said, we need to teach this in class because that is so important.

So then I went and I wrote an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school sleep curriculum, the first ever to be used in schools to teach children sleep.

They teach them nutrition. And they teach them physical education, but they don't teach about sleep. And I really do believe it should be required curriculum.

So I think the obstacle of not just staying with my private practice allowed me to touch back on my creativity side. and created these books and this curriculum.

And then I started working with the parents to get there. They would say to me, OK, help me. My kid gets asleep now. Can you help me? Can you help my older children?

And my practice ends up being from babies through adults. And still to this day, not that many people work with older kids and with adults. So that's really been a great part of my private practice.

Do you know the statistics around the number of people that are struggling with sleep, number of children that are struggling with sleep? What are we talking about here?

What percentage of population are people dealing with this? Yeah. Well, it's hard to know with kids because parents have a bad judgment of how well or poorly their kids are sleeping, but we know with teens about 70% of teens do not get the sleep they need.

I mean they are notoriously bad sleepers and college students as well. So really the whole first step is just getting them to understand the significance of the importance of sleep.

I just actually did a post today before I came on your podcast and it was back to school and The best way to start your journey towards academic success is getting good sleep.

And that's often time we're left out in the advice. Absolutely. We'll get into that a little bit later and use how, you know, sleep impacts your brain, your memory, some of these other things, but your hormone regulation, it's essential for detoxification, you know, for all of these different things.

Sleep Education, Children, and School Curricula

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Literally everything, right? Every body process that goes on is somehow affected by sleep. There's really nothing else in the world that can do that. That is so powerful.

Sleep is one of the most powerful things we can do, and it's often pushed to the side. So just for people to understand the impact it could have, on everything from head to toe.

I often describe sleep as like a big umbrella when you go out into a rainstorm and you need that umbrella to protect you from head to toe. That's what sleep does.

It's a protection. It's the best health insurance we could ever have. And it could be free if you know how to do it. It doesn't really… Yeah, yeah, yeah.

For paying for sleep now. Yeah, exactly. Well, there's a lot of people here that are very interested in longevity and I would love for you to just define what do you feel like longevity is and how is it that you've implemented longevity into your own life and how do you do it personally?

But I really think, I talk about sleeping the foundation of wellness, like they talk about diet and exercise, and it's like

the trifecta, but sleep's just one notch above.

And it really is the foundation of longevity as well. Just as we were just saying, you were pointing out all the things that sleep can affect, positively or negatively, from, let's talk, so I'm a psychologist, let's talk about the mental health aspect, right?

Which is just as important as our physical health. It affects our anxiety, our serotonin levels, our dopamine levels, our cortisol levels. And what does high cortisol do?

It increases inflammation, right? Stress and then inflammation, which is the cause of all serious diseases. So in order to keep inflammation down, of course it's eating and eating anti-inflammatory foods But a lot of people don't realize how much sleep affects our stress levels and our cortisol levels.

So that, from a mental health perspective. And then just go down the body and you think how it protects our cognition for Alzheimer's, right? There's so much research out there about sleep and Alzheimer's that it flushes out the toxins that cause Alzheimer's.

And then you go to your heart and it protects your cardiovascular. It regulates your blood pressure, hormones, practically every hormone. is our hunger hormones, our testosterone, estrogen.

A lot of talk about women and perimenopause and menopause with sleep. It's the second most highest complaint after night sweats, but a lot of the night sweats also happen because of sleep.

So, you know, then just continue going down the body. So, when I often, you know, when I work with hotels and spas and they bring in wellness programs, you know, we say if it's not, if sleep's not a component, you're doing it wrong or you're in the wrong business.

And I say that too about longevity and all these new longevity centers popping up. You cannot talk about longevity without sleep because course for you ultimately over time can affect one of those body processes that you need to stay healthy Wow Absolutely.

Yeah, and and honestly like it's so to me that the whole hospitality industry around quote-unquote longevity is is just not People don't really get it.

They don't they call that their their their resort a longevity resort or a wellness resort and And they don't get wellness or longevity. They don't have the tools.

You walk into a hotel room and they've got volatile organic compound-based mattresses and all these petrochemicals in their materials and unfiltered water and all of the things.

And how are you supposed to get a good sleep in those types of environments, right? Absolutely. I think sleep is so critical and paramount in the development of these businesses, which is why I'm so focused on it and I'm connecting with you, obviously, and we'll probably have a lot more exciting conversations and integrations of what your science has shown.

But that is, I think, why I'm so passionate about building this new brand, Centagio, because of the need for this in the marketplace. And I'll go to these different resorts around the world, and there's some of them that are great.

But there's such a lack of true wellness and longevity that I'm just like, wow, it's just wide open. Yeah, I agree. And I also think that a lot of it is focused on their marketing and not on programming.

Yeah. Right. So what I read and my focus always is zooming in on the sleep component. And it's always they focus on the greatest tech because that has the biggest wow factor.

Yeah. But what they don't realize, and this is for me spending my career truly wanting to help people, right? This is

about getting sleep better so you can sleep better.

A bed is not going to do it. A red light therapy is not going to do it. Those are adjuncts. Yes, you need a good mattress. Yes, red light therapy can definitely help, but you have to learn how to sleep.

And they're forgetting that aspect because that's not as sexy as having the room set up with the greatest, you know, that they can find. And a lot of times these companies call me and it's not the wellness departments that are asking for my help.

It's the marketing teats that are asking for my help. Interesting, that's very interesting. What are some of the biggest challenges or mindset shifts or routines or maybe even inner beliefs that have helped you stay grounded as you were moving forward and really helped you build what you've built today?

Well, I think at the foundation of it, I really owe a lot of who I am and how I function in business to my dad, who's now past 13 years, but he had a very, he was an entrepreneur himself.

And one thing I noticed about him is he always believed there's a solution to every problem. And if you go in thinking that there's a solution, you're going to find one.

And that's how you stay calm. And people have often asked me, I mean, I was a single mom raising kids alone and growing my business. And people always said, how are you so calm?

I don't drink much. I don't do any drugs. How do you handle your anxiety and stress?

Sleep, Longevity, and the Limits of Wellness Tech

And it's, it's, that's the mentality of there's always going to, we're going to figure this out. There's always going to be a solution. Right. But also the fact that I'm a sleep expert.

So at night when I would put my kids down and the work day would be over, I knew that everybody was in their bedrooms and sleeping through the night myself too.

And so you start the day breathing and stretching and making sure your stress levels are low. But then at night you get this, the sleep. that need to rejuvenate, and I think that that's just critical in everything.

You see, I'm going to be able to weave sleep into every single question you ask me. But there's always going to be obstacles. The other thing is the wonderful thing about sleep, and again, I've been doing this for 20 years.

When I first started, nobody wanted to listen to me. Sleep was not a topic that anybody truly cared about and I was screaming it from the rooftops and nobody wanted to hear.

My job has gotten a lot easier because sleep is such a big deal now. It's having its time on the world stage. I'm on the world stage with it, on podcasts like yours, being able to talk about something I've known for so long is so important.

So with all the obstacles and the changes, it has allowed me to really be an entrepreneur and sleep. I always just thought I have a private practice and that would be it.

I'm a PhD psychologist. What else really do we do, right? But now the total work in spas and hotels with longevity centers, wellness, real estate, writing books and curriculums, it's beyond my wildest imagination what I pictured being able to do.

So there's been a little bit of luck in that as well that I chose a field that was obscure, but now it's, you know, a $500 billion industry, so they said.

That's so good. Now we'll get into brass tacks here in a second, but I was wondering if there was any kind of like personal failure or challenge that you had that kind of created the ability for you to grow to where you are right now.

I've been very lucky in my risks that I've taken in my career. They've worked out because I'm spotting trends. But I think the greatest obstacle really was doing this as a single mom.

and raising kids by myself and finding the time to do it all. And you just said before we got on the podcast, you have four children running around right now as you're doing your oxygen therapy and a podcast.

So for all the parents out there, what made me get into the field originally when I ended up is I talked about being that stay-at-home mom that I didn't expect to be and a child that didn't sleep.

I knew that I would not be able to function as a parent successfully and have a thriving child without sleep. And I think that's really been the key to my success is every night I get into bed and I Okay, I wake up and I feel good the next day and so did my kids and they're in their 20s, but they continue to have their focus on sleep too.

So I really do believe that that's got me over a lot of the obstacles and hurdles I faced. That's amazing. Yeah. And so like there's a lot of misunderstandings I think about sleep.

There's a lot of people that that again, they think it's like the tech that they're going to use or the breathing they're going to do after, you know, five glasses of alcohol and that's going to help them make better or whatever.

You know, like I literally stopped drinking alcohol because I saw what it was doing to my readiness score and my deep sleep in my oar ring. And I was like, oh my gosh, I only had two glasses of red wine last night.

And this was years ago when I started doing more biometric tracking and I started to see just the impact that it had on my sleep. But the other thing that I thought was so shocking was it didn't just impact me the next day, it impacted my readiness score, my energy score, I guess you could call it, for the next four or five days.

And so I was like, whoa, like this is just two glasses of wine is actually like increasing. Um, a lot of challenges and, and decreasing my productivity.

And, um, and so I was like, look, I'm just, I'm not even going to entertain this, even though it was like organic biodynamic. Um, and so, um, you know, that, that was a decision that I made just because I was, I was like, well, this, this is this.

impacts my sleep at such a high level. And it may not for other people at the level that it does for me, but you know, what is one of the biggest things that people misunderstand about sleep?

And what do you think people should know about that? I think that's a great point, and I'm so happy you said that. I will infrequently drink as well. And when I do, I just accept that I'm not going to sleep well that night.

And maybe it's worth it. For a celebration, we have to live. But alcohol is just not sleep-friendly. And for me, it's not worth it. At this stage of the game, I'm more interested in getting a good night of sleep, so I'm on board with you.

The number one sleep aid is alcohol, and people don't understand that it is a depressant. And so it might make you fall asleep faster, but there's something that happens once your body metabolizes the alcohol, and there's a rebound effect, and it's going to wake you up.

So people usually say, oh, they fell asleep so easily, but they still didn't have a good night's sleep. and it prevents you from going to the deep land sleep that you need.

So I think a misconception, I think people might actually realize it, but it's this whole quick fix mentality. And that was a challenge for me as well.

Like during COVID, when everybody's mental health was suffering and their sleep was suffering immensely, and then when we got out of COVID, a lot of huge companies and multi-million dollar, billion dollar companies started getting into the sleep space and the marketing is for that quick fix, right?

And what I do is not, it's not long-term, but it's not that. I'm not prescribing pills. I don't really suggest that unless for certain circumstances. And that's, There's such great research behind what's called CBTI, cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, and there's no side effects to it.

And there's always going to be side effects to medication, even to over the counter pills like melatonin, which we could have a whole separate podcast on.

So, and the last thing I want to say just about maybe a misconception about sleep is that every night you have to have perfect sleep and I think that these sleep trackers are feeding into that.

And what they have found some research is showing that. If you don't wear your sleep tracker and you had a poor night of sleep, you might rate yourself as, okay, I didn't sleep so great.

But if you had a good night of sleep, but you wore a sleep tracker and they mess with it and they showed that you slept badly, you will believe that you had a bad night of sleep.

And it will affect you the next day. So we so believe what these rings and all these trackers are telling us, it gets into our psyche. You know what? That's really good.

Yeah, that's really good. Keep going. I want to make a comment on this. Go ahead. So, you know, I think that we have to accept the fact that not every night is going to be great.

And as I've spoken to you and I said, oh, every night I get into bed and I sleep so great and my kids don't. I mean, that's really is kind of a lie. Every night, I'm human.

Things happen. The number one problem and cause of behavioral sleep problems is stress and anxiety. And no one is immune to that. We all go through times in our lives where that is going to defeat us.

Stress and anxiety is going to overpower our brain and our body, and we're not going to have good sleep. But the difference is in how we handle it. So number one, when I go into schools and I ask teenagers or I ask adults when I do corporate workshops, What's the number one thing you do when you can't sleep at night?

You know what the answer is? Well, besides going on your phone. But after that, they say nothing. People just don't know how to fix their sleep and how to get back to sleep.

And that's the key. And even if the stress and anxiety is at a level where everything you know, the deep breathing and the relaxation, and you should get out of bed and go to your sleep oasis and all these things we work on, Maybe it's just not going to work that night.

You know what? It's okay. Because we're all human and you will survive that night. And the next night, your sleep drive is going to be so strong that you will have a much, most likely a much easier time that night getting to sleep.

So even sleep experts don't sleep perfect.

Daily Sleep Routine and Melatonin Guidance

Oh, that's good. I have a follow up question for that, which is, can you catch up on sleep? But before I do that, before you answer that question, I want to comment on this, this, this wearable.

Like I've, I've worn Garmin watch, Apple watch, loop band, um, or a ring, et cetera. That's the or ring is what I use right now. And I think that there's.

a very important distinction that you made that I came to the conclusion of maybe two or three years ago in that I literally lived and died by the scores that I would have.

What ended up happening was I got to the point where when I knew that I went to bed late at night or I stayed up with my friends or I was reading a book late at night or whatever it was, and I knew my sleep score was not going to be good the next day, I just would not look at all or let my ring up upload because I was like, this is impacting me psychologically more than I'd like.

And to hear that confirmed by that research is so fascinating. And I think that It can be useful, it can be helpful. For some people, I think they should only use it a season of time because of their psychology around the ring.

For me, I know that this isn't the end all and be all. And this isn't something that I let control me, I control it. And that's where I look at it and, you know, I'll probably Right now, I probably look at data maybe 50% of the year.

And the other 50%, you know, I'll have it on, but I just either won't upload or whatever. And if I go on vacation, I'm not bringing the ring with me. You have a very healthy…

relationship with your earring or with your wearable, which is great, and most people just don't. I say they're not bad. All that stuff is a great adjunct to an okay sleeper or somebody who's having maybe a little trouble and is ready to take that information and do something with it.

But otherwise, for really poor sleepers or insomniacs, people who have clinical insomnia, It's it mocks you right like you know you didn't sleep well you don't have to look and it's a yeah you did it you know and all day long you could see that number we don't need we know the whole the bottom line is how do you feel the next day can you function is you getting the sleep you need what can you do differently.

Right. Right. So, so talk about some of your top recommendations, right? You've got, you, one of them you said was clinical psychology. I'd love for you to double click in that and tell us like what, you know, why, why is clinical psychology great for sleep?

Um, the other, the other is, um, I would love to just know what, what you would say the best kind of rhythm is for being able to get into good sleep and maybe what your, your routine in the day looks like around that.

When people ask me that, it's funny because it sounds like kind of nothing to me, but I guess it is a commitment, right? And I'll talk about how you get to that commitment.

So I think it's what I do throughout the day doesn't seem like a lot. You don't have to do everything. And they're all small steps. And even if you do one step, you're one step closer to getting better sleep.

So I wake up in the morning, I immediately get in my yoga mat, I do my breathing, and I stretch it. That's how I start my day. Drink a glass of water to hydrate.

Get outside, get some sunshine. Yes, Dr. Huberman talks about that all the time and it does work. Air and sunshine is really important to restart your day.

And I do a morning journal. And then I personally like to, I do a three mile walk every morning, if I can outside, if not on my treadmill. And that's how I get my day going.

And throughout the day, I, again, I don't recommend this for everybody, but I intermittent fast because that helps me with my sleep, different from trying to stay away from heavy foods and sugary foods and all that stuff.

Do you reverse it a minute fast or do you enter it fast like morning meals? Yeah, I try to eat between 12 and 8. Okay, great. And I do not drink any caffeine.

So again, I don't need it. I love coffee, but I drink decaf. On that, like, I noticed that even if I drink decaf, like I have

the CYP gene, which is the caffeine sensitive gene.

But when I drink even decaf, I'll get a bad sleep at night. What is up with that? Well, everybody, yeah, everybody has, you know, it has different sensitivities to it.

So you just have to know what's good for you. I'd say. if you're gonna do that, like the recommendations for caffeine, is to cut it off before the afternoon.

So I'm not against caffeine, and I actually think there's a lot of good things for it, not maybe for somebody like you. But I just particularly don't like it.

I don't need it. I don't like my heart races from caffeine, so this is just not for me. But if people are gonna do it, it's somebody that you should stick till the morning, not the afternoon.

Again, we talked about alcohol, not really much part of my life anymore, sporadically. In the afternoon, late afternoon, I try to get in another workout.

So I start in the morning, I work during the day, and then I do another walk on my treadmill or outside. One of the great things also besides getting sunlight in the morning is you try to be outside at sunset, at dusk, and that's letting your body know also that now it's time to be winding down.

So when the weather permits, it's really good to be outside during that time. I like to take hot showers at night. A lot of people do not know this, but not only is it relaxing for me, but what happens when you get out of a hot shower, your body temperature goes up in the shower and then it has to drop.

And that is actually what the body needs to start producing naturally melatonin. So instead of taking a melatonin gummy, there's things you can do to make your body produce melatonin naturally, and that's lowering your body temperature.

It needs to get lowered by like two degrees in order to start producing the melatonin. With just on the melatonin there, do you have issues with people taking five, 10 milligrams of melatonin before bed?

Yeah, so melatonin was actually first used for shift workers and for jet lag. And those are two situations where I would recommend it. It's also been found helpful for children with ASD on the autism spectrum disorder.

So there are times when melatonin can and maybe even should be used. However, it wasn't meant to be used long-term. So there's really not a lot of research to show whether it is safe long-term.

Short-term, they have found it is safe. So if you're taking it, I always say don't get scared. They're not showing that it is unsafe. Anything over three milligrams, researchers show that you start to have side effects.

like headaches, nausea, anxiety, and very vivid dreams and nightmares. And so many people, I can't tell you when I say this, that's why I've been having those crazy dreams and nightmares.

And they're taking a lot more than three milligrams. Your body also gets used to it, it acclimates, so then you're gonna have to get up to the 10 and more milligrams.

It was not meant to be taken like that. Other, the scientists that study melatonin have found that it's because it's not FDA regulated that the labels are different than what's actually in it.

So they are finding that there's sometimes 0% melatonin. So you think you're taking it or not, which maybe would have a placebo effect up to 100 times the amount of melatonin.

And they've also found that some brands have serotonin in it. THC in it, CBD in it. So you really have to be careful because it's unregulated that you don't actually know it's getting into it.

So especially, and especially for children, there have been a few studies that have shown that it could potentially affect puberty. So why would you do it?

People are giving babies melatonin. There are so many things you could do. A lot of it, if it's not a medical issue, it's behavioral and parents just need to learn how to get them to sleep and not start with the pills and for kids taking gummies and stuff.

Then they start to think, well, I need to take something in order to sleep. And that could be a rocky road as to what children and teens try after they find that melatonin is unhelpful.

And melatonin actually is just a sleep schedule regulator. It also is not, it doesn't sedate you. It doesn't make you fall asleep faster. They actually found that melatonin only helps you fall asleep between four to seven minutes quicker.

So for four to seven minutes, is it really worth a potential long-term side effect that we're unaware of? I don't think so. Interesting. Wow. And does it block puberty in children?

They're saying that it can cause issues with, because it's related to the sex hormones. Right, right. Wow. So not a lot of research on that, but if there's the possibility, you know, again, always you talk to your doctor, sometimes like kids on the autism spectrum, their benefits might outweigh any of the risks.

So we're learning more now that the increase in knowledge since COVID, it's skyrocketed. So much. Yeah, I think there's a lot more research to come on melatonin Yeah, but there are there are appropriate ways to take it and times to take it But again, I try to myself and I are I didn't do anything for me So I like to suggest things that I've tried and what works for me and melatonin just didn't work for me And I'm happy it didn't That's good.

No, sorry to derail you from your kind of checklist of things that we should be doing, but I just wanted to look into what your thoughts were on melatonin.

And we can talk about supplements like Altheanine and GABA and stuff later, but talk to me about, you know, continue your thought process around. My day, everything is focused on sleep.

And then, yeah, so taking a shower, doing a whole skincare routine, and I do my nighttime journal. And I think journaling is probably one of my most favorite suggestions for people.

As a psychologist, what happens is we have all these thoughts and things that happen during the day. But we're busy, and we don't have time to process.

And if you do not process, those thoughts are going to come back exactly when you don't want them, when you're trying to fall asleep or when you, for some reason, wake up in the middle of the night.

And that's not the time that you want to sit in first process. So getting those thoughts out in a journal and getting them on paper will make sure that when we're trying to fall asleep or get back to sleep, you've processed and they're not going to intrude.

So journaling is one of my most favorite easy tasks. And, you know, it could be a checklist of things that you do during the day. So you're, you're just, you, You're being held accountable to your behaviors for sleep.

So I'm a big proponent of journaling. And then I do my yoga stretching again, legs up the wall, the room, turn the temperature down to 60 degrees, sometimes even lower.

Get my pillow spray, my lavender pillow spray. I have my sleep mask ready beside me in case I need it. Get into bed, do my deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and hopefully fall asleep easily.

That's great. When do you use your sleep mask? It's interesting again about what I do and don't do. There was a

time when my kids were still living in the house and they were older teenagers and up at night and I needed their lights on so I was starting to use earplugs and a sleep mask to sleep.

and was very, very effective. Now that my kids are out of the house and I kind of control the whole home environment, I don't really feel I need it, but it's so interesting because what would happen is I found this amazing sleep mask that when I would put it on if I woke up in the middle of the night, within like a minute, I would fall back to sleep.

Now, once you know something is helpful, like these cognitive restructuring games that I teach people, if you have a breathing practice that you use, The next time you're going to use them, they're going to work faster because you have this like in your arsenal, like you know, okay, so it would be amazing.

It was like a Pavlovian response. The second I put on the mask, my whole body calmed down and I was able to go to sleep. I keep it by my nightstand. I don't fall asleep with it anymore.

But if I were to wake up in the middle of the night, the first thing I'll do is put it on because it just is a natural relaxation mechanism for me. And I recommend it to a lot of people too, something as simple as an eye mask.

And it really can change things for some people. Wow. That is really, really cool. Yeah. Yeah. I think that there are certain triggers for me that helped me go to sleep.

Like one of them is stretching before bed. Yeah. And the other, I know that some people wouldn't do this because it may not be relaxing for them, but I love doing myofascial release with like even the lacrosse ball or something like that, which is probably painful for some people.

For me is very relaxing because I just get in on these kind of trigger points, I debrief through them. But there is nuance to some of this stuff, right?

Like, you know, each person needs to kind of build their own, you know, system, if you will.

Journaling, CBT-I, and Managing Stress at Night

Yes, you have to. It's trial and error. And what I always tell people is, Don't listen to my advice. Try it once and go, oh, she's fallacious. I know what she's talking about.

Give it a week. These things don't happen overnight. There's these cognitive restructuring games that I teach little, little kids, simple, to adults. And my favorite one is a four-letter word game.

So you think of a word like stop, and then you, you know, S is, you know, silly, T is terrific. And you go through, you know, the four letters and then you start again.

For children, I do the ABC game and it's as simple as A is apple, B is ball. And that's easy for them. And I always say, if you can't think of a word, move on to the next.

This is not a test. And once you get through the alphabet once, people will go, oh, it didn't work. You have to keep going. And usually, the first time, you might have to go through the alphabet a few times.

And next thing you know, you go, oh, wait, it's morning. How did I get there? And the next time, you're going to go through the alphabet a little bit less.

So sometimes, if I decide I'll have to do the four-letter word game or the alphabet game to make the alphabet game a little more difficult for adults.

I'll say like, you know, theme it. So A is amazing. B is beautiful. C is cute. And I'll get up to like F, G, and then it's morning. Again, kind of like the eye mask, because you're going in saying, oh, this is BS.

No, you're going in saying, this is work, and it's all up here. And that's the psychologist. That's the cognitive behavioral therapy. The training that I had in grad school was as a cognitive behavioral psychologist.

It's training the brain. to train the body. And so when we're having some sort of anxiety reaction or sleep anxiety, your heart's racing. That's a physiological response to your thoughts.

So we have to change our thoughts to change our behavior and having those distractions. Again, it sounds so silly. So much of my advice sounds like it doesn't matter, but you put it all together along with the breathing and the journaling and all that stuff and it's just a recipe for wonderful sleep.

So if you were journaling some stressful challenges, you feel like the stress getting down on paper actually helps you get better sleep at night? Yes, 100%. Yeah.

Interesting. My wife does that so well. And I'm like, I don't even want to write down some of the things that I experienced during the day. But you know what?

I'm going to try that. I'm going to start journaling the things that maybe take place throughout the day. I will say that the most challenging time of my life of sleep was I had a business just completely explode and in a good way, like financially in less than two years, it was at $12 million and growing fast.

And so and our profit margin was very high. So we had we had like seven million dollars in the bank, something like that. And it was just it got wired out by one of the partners.

And it was done in a way that was like extremely sneaky. They built all these shell companies, et cetera. And so I got into this lawsuit, of which I won.

But during the three years of going through this lawsuit, it was supposed to be an expedited arbitration. Unfortunately, this person lived in a different country, so it had to go through the International Court of Commerce.

So it was like, you know, pulling your hair out. But then the sleep, the way that it impacted your sleep was just unbelievable. And so in the past, like if I could go back, I would be like, I'm not even going to touch this.

I'm going to move on, you know, focus on what you can. Do even though I won the lawsuit. I lost a lot of sleep. Like that was it The key thing was the stress that impacted my sleep boys and and it started to stockpile, right?

So if if somebody's in a situation where they have a lot of stress kids Whatever, what are some like cognitive? neurobehavioral Things they can do like you you shared like journal Um, you know, count, count down the alphabet.

I've heard count down backwards from a hundred. But what are, what are some things that might, might support this or, or is it just those things? I mean, there's a few things.

I just want to go back to what you said about that experience that you went through and now thinking about what I was saying to you about journaling. So what you have to remember about thoughts and sleep is that anything that you've learned that's coming to your brain during the day needs to be processed and consolidated during sleep, and it's going to happen.

So if you want all those negative things to not intrude and infiltrate your mind, you need to process them while you're awake. So I don't suggest doing that.

My journaling at night before bed, for me, I'm a list taker. I'm always like, oh, am I going to forget this to get this tomorrow or this meeting? So part of my journaling is my to-do list.

Getting out the negative stuff earlier in the day, so you get it out, but it's not what you're thinking about when you're going to sleep. With children, I always say you have to schedule a talk time with kids, because as a dad, you know

this, right?

They don't tell you anything bad that happened during the day, and you go to tuck them in at night, and all of a sudden it's, my teacher said this, and my friend did this, and I have a project tomorrow, and all this, right?

They have to, you have to give them time and you don't want to ignore it, but you don't want to feed into that right before bed. So giving kids journal or talk time or older kids journals where they can get it out.

So those you found out is a fantastic thing to do. So I think people are scared of those thoughts, but they're going to creep in whether you like it or not.

So it's better to get it out earlier rather than at night. And then those things I was talking about are all cognitive, but then there's the behavioral component, and that's the deep breathing.

And many years ago, I took up yoga, and I learned how to breathe and pranayama breathing and all that, and four, seven, eight breathing. And that really was life-changing for me too, not just for sleep, but if I'm giving a presentation to hundreds of people, I'm excited, but a little nervous, and I feel shallow breaths.

And that has taught me how to breathe slower and deeper. And it must calm you down because it's literally helping your parasympathetic nervous system, right?

You're slowing it down. So learning how to slow your thoughts, learning how to slow your breath and your heart rate are all really important. components to just stress in general, but sleep.

And that's why I think that even if you don't have trouble with sleep, but everybody has issues with stress, seeing a cognitive behavioral psychologist or any practice or even doing some of those meditation apps and those breathing apps or online, it doesn't have to be a psychologist, but any program, app out there that's going to teach you how to breathe better and restructure your thoughts.

We could all benefit from any kind of longevity health standpoint along with sleep. Wow, that's so good. And it's such a missed, like, one of the things I've really appreciated about this interview is it's, you know, there is so many kind of cool technologies that are out there to help us sleep now and visors you can wear before bed and helmets and vibrators and all this crazy stuff and, you know, bio-photo modulation.

And it's kind of like, oh, just process your thoughts before bed. It's like one of the best things you could do, right? That's simple. Again, those things are sexy.

And I'm not against sleep tech. I'm really not. I think it's a great adjunct. But this is what I say to wellness resorts and these places that are just spending so much money on all of these things is people just have to learn how.

First, so my job is the wise. Why is sleep important? Because you're not going to do any of this if you don't believe me. That sleep is the most important thing we do.

But then the hows. And when I see that, you know, people like me are not being brought into these wellness programming, and they're instead just bringing in the most expensive mattress and tech.

Those are great, but people need to learn how to sleep. And if you want, or as a resort, a hotel, you don't want just your clients, your guests, to sleep well in the hotel.

You want it to translate to home, right? Yeah. So anything you learn, you want to bring home with you, even if it's just like a day spot kind of situation.

And you can replicate those rooms. I don't have a personal masseuse. Yeah, I love massages, but someone's not going to come in and give me a massage every night before bed.

So that can help you in de-stress, but that's not what you have to teach people, how they're going to get really good sleep when they leave. your property, your spa, your longevity center.

So I always say that I'm kind of the missing piece to it, right? The science is great to support it, but it's the practitioners, the people that know how to help people get better sleep.

And then once you're doing better, all those things are great adjuncts and those rings can even make you get better sleep and the right mattress, of course, is critical.

And like I said, all those modulators and machines and things you lay in and the lights and the headbands and all that stuff is good. And maybe the science is going to even get better on it.

But that's not going to cure your insomnia. That's not the answer. That's the adjunct. So if I hear you correctly, it's in more of the simple things in that you wake up, you get sunlight, you stretch, you maintain awareness around breath throughout the day, you keep your stress levels normalized and low and then you know, into the evening.

You get that hot shower. You're not eating a huge meal before bed. You have a nighttime routine that should ideally include, you know, breathing and maybe something spiritual.

And then, you know, you've got your journaling, right? Where you get your thoughts done. It doesn't need to take long. I assume like five, 10, 15 minutes.

And then, you know, you spray your lavender on your pillow. You make sure everything is dark, you know, blackout curtains. And then you ideally follow that circadian rhythm, right, where you're going to bed at the same time waking up at roughly the same time.

Right, right. So there's other components. And the specific components of CBT-I, it's not all just sleep hygiene, right? There's more specific things to it about Sleep restriction when you shouldn't be in bed a certain amount of time and getting out of bed There's a you know, 2020 rule when you don't fall asleep You shouldn't get out of bed and I what I call is a sleep oasis to create in your room and learning how to get yourself back to sleep and sleep scheduling and your sleep environment and Sleep consistency is probably the most important thing with our schedule.

So there's a lot of other components not just the hygiene But that's the that's the easy that's the first step, you know Let's let's fix that and see if that helps and then you have to get into somebody who actually has insomnia We have to actually figure out, you know where this is coming from why it's happening how long it's been around, you know dealing with the medications, maybe waiting off medication, speaking to doctors and psychiatrists that put them on the medication, all the realistic things.

There's ideals for sleep, and I always say I talk on ideals, and then you tell me, well, what can you actually do? One of the things in CBTI is this 2020 rule.

Um, where, so it's, you know, you, you want your bed to be a stimulus for sleep. So you have this stimulus control issue where when you, most people who sleep alley look at their bed and it brings up anxiety, right?

When I walk into my room, I look at my bed, I go, yay, like, ah, I can't wait to get in. But for a lot of people looking at their bed reminds them that they're not sleeping.

So you have to get up out of bed. And that's a suggestion that people have a really hard time with. It's like, wait, in the middle of the night, you want me to get up out of bed and go to a different area of my room or another room and do something else?

Supplements, Future Projects, and Closing Remarks

And people don't want to do that. But laying in bed is just going to enhance this whole negative you know,

association with poor sleep. So there are specific components and things depending on what people are going through that you're going to recommend.

But really for everybody, generally, it's all these things that I do during the day. And the other important thing also is, like you said about your circadian rhythm, that's a 24-hour sleep cycle.

So people think, oh, I could drink caffeine all day, workout late, eat heavy. have alcohol, but then I breathe before bed, so shouldn't I be able to fall asleep easy?

Well, no, we need to focus on sleep within a 24-hour cycle. From when we wake up to when we go to sleep, everything we do is going to have a play and an effect on what happens when we actually get into bed and we're ready to fall asleep.

That's good. Yeah, that's really good. Last thing, really two things is what are your favorite supplements for sleep? I'd love to know that. And then what's next for you?

What projects are you excited about or breakthroughs are you working on right now? Yeah, sure. So my number one favorite supplement is magnesium glycinate.

That's what I take every night. There is magnesium threonate as well. That's good for cognitive function, so I recommend if people want to take that as well, take that during the day, but the glycinate's good for night.

And that's really the only supplement I take, not for TMI, but I'm on hormone replacement therapy. And so women who are in hormone replacement therapy take progesterone.

And for me and for many women, not all, but for many, that helps sleep so much because it actually helps you relax. So much so that I had to cut down my magnesium intake because I was like deliriously tired all day long when I started progesterone and I was taking magnesium.

It was almost too much for my body. though I cut down my magnesium and I found the right balance for me. But yeah, you know, again, simple is better. I don't just believe in spending all this money.

So much of it just really has to do with, you know, your brain and your body and, you know, all those other things are, you know, if you have the money to spend, that's great and it can help, but let's get down to the basics.

Let's just figure out why you're not sleeping well and use your own cognition, your own body to help you sleep and that way, no matter where you are, you're on vacation, you're, God forbid, at a hospital for you or for a family member, you have ways to get to sleep.

You don't say, oh, I need a red light sauna now to get to sleep. That's just not realistic. All your tools, your toolbox are all within you. I love it.

I love it. All your tools and toolbox is within you. So tell us what you're working on now and where we can find more about you. Yeah. So shocker after this.

The next big project I'm working on is a sleep journal. I'm over thinking so much about it. I've seen a lot of sleep journals out there, but they don't do what I believe needs to be done morning and night and everything that needs to go into that.

That's how much I truly believe in it. I was going to write a third children's book, but I decided I'm going to put that off for right now and create this journal.

I'm very excited about it, again, using my creative brain. I have a really big focus now. Sleep is on this global stage and believe it or not I was an actress as a child and I performed off Broadway and on TV so I'm very comfortable in front of the camera and so in my third chapter I talk about in work I loved working one-on-one with families and the

impact was amazing and changing people's lives is really why I became a psychologist to begin with.

But now I want to get on the global stage like sleep and get to as many people as I can in this third chapter of life talking about the importance of sleep, making a difference in as many people's lives as possible.

And so I'm working with bigger brands as a spokesperson because I'm comfortable on camera and with partnerships and with hotels and always looking for the next trend, which is actually how you and I met.

which we both know is wellness real estate. I see that there's a big opportunity. Like I said, you can't replicate the hotel rooms in your room. And so what good is it if you have all these fancy things in the hotel room that you come back to your room and you don't have anything like that?

So what can we build in luxury real estate to better sleep? And what else can we do for the everyday person who doesn't have all that money to make their homes conducive for sleep?

And again, it's not just the bedroom, because sleep is a 24-hour sleep-wake cycle, so we have to make sure the whole house is conducive to helping us sleep better at night.

So that's kind of the next trend that I'm hopping on, and I'm excited about it. Oh, congratulations. Well, would you have a website they can find you at?

Yeah. Yeah, my website is solvehoursleep.com. And Instagram is at Solvour Asleep, everything Solvour Asleep. And LinkedIn is Whitney Roby on PhD. Great.

Well, Whitney, thank you so much. This is such a great interview. And we went deep into a lot of different things. And one that I really appreciate is the cognitive kind of psychological element of sleep that a lot of people don't really talk about.

So thank you again. And I highly recommend go check her website and follow her on social. And Whitney, appreciate you showing up today. Thank you so much.

It was so fun talking to you. And keep sleeping well. Thank you. Take care. Thank you for tuning into Doctor Talks. We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health.

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