

the rest of your life

WAKE UP TO THE LATEST RESEARCH: A GOOD SNOOZE
CAN MAKE YOU SMARTER, CALMER AND HAPPIER.

SLEEP, like air, is something we completely take for granted—until we don't get enough of it. And for many American women, that happens a lot. But while skimping on shut-eye may seem like a good way to get a jump start on tomorrow's to-do list, it comes at a high cost: Research shows that shorting yourself on sleep raises your risk for accidents, weight gain, depression, hypertension, diabetes and lots of other ailments. On top of that, there's evidence that getting sufficient sleep—at least seven hours a night—can improve your mood, boost coping skills and make it easier to solve problems. Check out some of the latest findings on the surprising benefits of sleep.

BY NORINE DWORKIN-McDANIEL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY FREDRIK BRODEN

☾ IT HELPS YOU SOLVE ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS

Obviously, you can think about a vexing issue more clearly when you're well rested. But when you sleep on it, your brain actually has the opportunity to work things out from a different perspective. That's because sleep gives your conscious mind a break and lets the subconscious take a whack at finding a solution, says Rosalind Cartwright, Ph.D., author of *Crisis Dreaming: Using Your Dreams to Solve Your Problems*.

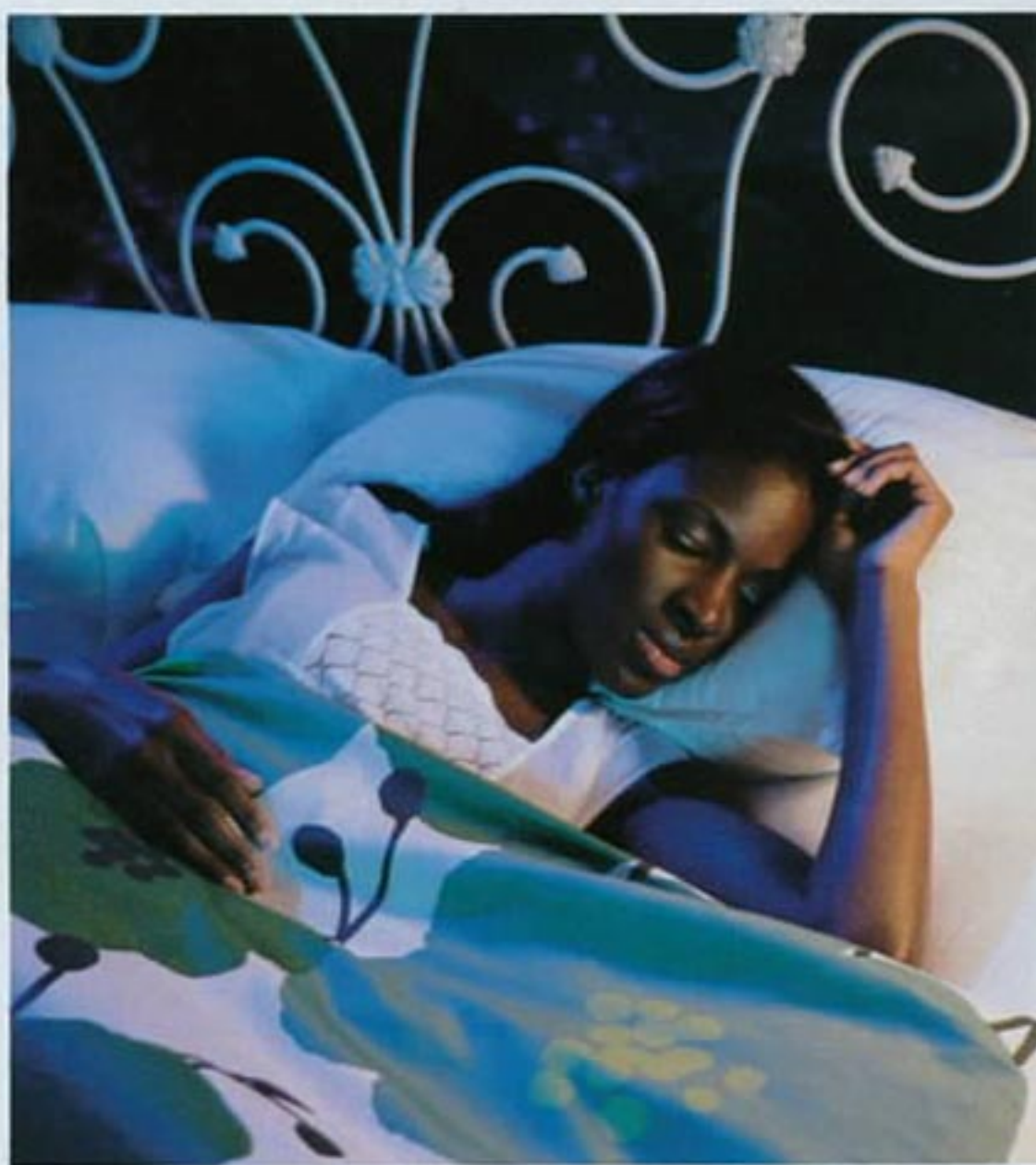
You've probably experienced this phenomenon if you've ever tried (with growing frustration) to remember the name of, say, that red-haired actress . . . you know the one . . . you just saw her in *Julie & Julia*. You can picture her face; you just can't think of her name. *Argh*. But go to sleep and bingo! "In the morning you've got it," Dr. Cartwright says. Of course, Amy Adams!

No one knows for certain why this happens, but scientists suspect that, during sleep, the brain lets go of extraneous details and holds on to central facts. So rather than considering everything you know about her—what she wore in the movie, whom she has dated, what other films you saw her in—your sleeping mind focuses on the essential facts, like her face and name. That makes the information much easier to retrieve when you wake up.

Another way you problem-solve in your sleep: You actually dream up solutions to problems. One reason this happens is that the self-censoring side of the brain—the part that says *That's dumb, it'll never work!*—isn't as active at night, so we're able to think more freely. "When you're awake, you usually think with the logical side of your brain, but when you're dreaming you think with

the more intuitive, imagery-based part of it, and that gives you a different perspective," says Deirdre Barrett, Ph.D., author of *The Committee of Sleep*.

Some people say they've solved practical dilemmas in their dreams, like how to rearrange the living-room



furniture or which jacket to wear with that new skirt. But dreaming can help with larger issues. Dr. Cartwright recalls a time when she was contemplating a job offer. She had a dream one night in which she was literally up in the air. Then she floated down onto a throne and was crowned. "I woke up saying, 'I'm going to accept the position,'" laughs Dr. Cartwright.

☾ IT MAKES YOU SMARTER

Learning apparently doesn't stop once you close your eyes. Research has found that a good night's sleep helps your brain lock in the information that you take in during the day.

In a study at Harvard University researchers found that people performed better on certain tasks after sleeping. In one experiment volunteers

were asked to type a number sequence with their left hand as quickly as possible. They were retested periodically during the day and, after showing some initial improvement, they reached a plateau. "But the next morning their performance improved dramatically," says

Robert Stickgold, Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. "Typing the same number sequence, they were 20 percent faster and made up to 50 percent fewer errors." And after a second night's sleep they did even better.

Other experiments have also shown that sleep actually improves memory. In another Harvard study college students were asked to remember pairs of words after a 12-hour period. One group was tested on the words in the evening; another in the morning. The group that slept recalled more words.

☾ IT IMPROVES YOUR MOOD

No one has to tell you that when you toss and turn all night long you can feel anxious, irritable and crabby the next day. But you may not know why: When you're sleep-deprived the area of your brain responsible for judgment and rational thought—the prefrontal cortex—basically shuts down. But at the same time the part of the brain that handles emotions—the amygdala—goes into overdrive. In fact, brain scans done by scientists at the University of California, Berkeley found that when you're not well rested your amygdala is about 60 percent more active than it is when you've logged a solid night's sleep.

One more reason you might be Miss Cranky Pants: When you don't get enough sleep you miss out on

significant REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which is when you're most likely to dream. Why would that make you grouchy? Dreaming helps you process negative emotions and sort through all the things that irked you during the day: the salad dressing you dripped on your silk blouse, the fight you had with your husband. As the night wears on and your brain files away those annoying experiences, your dreams become more positive. So, if you don't get enough sleep, you miss out on those last beneficial dream cycles.

☾ IT BOOSTS COPING SKILLS

Have you ever noticed that you tend to have anxiety dreams when you're dealing with a major life event? It's not unusual for brides to dream about wedding disasters or for expectant mothers to have nightmares about a baby being lost or hurt. Although such dreams can be unsettling, they are actually quite helpful. "As you sleep your mind is reviewing, revising and rehearsing the events of your waking life," says Dr. Cartwright. This process helps you better understand what you're currently going through, increasing your ability to deal with the situation.

It's also common for people in the throes of a life change to dream about other anxious times in their past. A person starting a new job, for example, might dream about the night she was in a car accident. That's because as you dream your mind sorts through your memory bank to home in on other periods when you felt the same way you do now. "Those past situations can help us figure out how to deal with the current challenge," Dr. Cartwright says. But whether you're dealing with a major event or just everyday stuff, getting a good night's rest is key to making you feel in control of your life.

sleep better tonight

THESE STRATEGIES WILL HELP YOU DOZE OFF MORE QUICKLY AND SNOOZE MORE SOUNDLY ALL NIGHT LONG, ACCORDING TO ELLEN MICHAUD, AUTHOR OF *SLEEP TO BE SEXY, SMART, AND SLIM*.

☾ SLOW IT DOWN Don't hop into bed right after checking Facebook or watching *Mad Men*. Build in some quiet time to take a bath, read or chat with your husband and you'll find it easier to fall into a deeper sleep.

☾ FEEL THE CHILL Turn down the thermostat or open a window in your bedroom. Experts say that people tend to sleep better when the room is slightly cool.

☾ DON'T DRINK Caffeinated beverages aren't the only ones that interfere with sleep. Alcohol can also be a culprit: Though you may fall asleep quickly after a cocktail or two, you're more likely to wake up or sleep less soundly a few hours later.

☾ HIDE THE CLOCK Staring at the clock when you can't sleep just ups your stress levels.

☾ GET SEXY Your bed isn't only for sleeping, you know! An orgasm is one of the most powerful sleep inducers around.

