**STEP-BY-STEP, Eight Hours of Deep Restful Sleep**

By Diane Smalley for Avenues to Wellness

Sleep is inextricably linked to all aspects of your health.

Diane Smalley, L.Ac., gave a talk on this subject as part of the Avenues to Wellness Speaker Series on May 2. As all of the talks are, the talk was filmed and will be shown on Channel 3 in Willits, rotating with the talks given since March 2014. All of the Avenues to Wellness talks can be viewed on [Vimeo.com](http://Vimeo.com). and typing in Avenues to Wellness. Find the talks and the written material on [www.avenuestowellness.org](http://www.avenuestowellness.org).

Sleep was explored from angles of easing stress, balancing blood sugar, resolving inflammation, setting the environment and self-awareness. How do we achieve the sought-after relaxation and deep sleep? The basic answers are regular eating, sleeping and exercise routines, exhaling on effort, learning some basic remedy touchstones for health and just plain slowing down.

We talked about the hormone, cortisol, which is secreted by the adrenal glands (sit on top of the kidneys). Cortisol is involved in blood sugar balance, digestion, immunity, weight management, exercise recovery, thyroid gland function, and, of course, sleep. Cortisol rises to deal with stressful situations. High cortisol keeps us from falling asleep. When cortisol is high, melatonin cannot rise and stimulate a natural sleep cycle. Taking an herbal formula to repair the adrenal gland function, massage, music, dance and laughter are the best medicine for lowering cortisol. Nutrients of omega-3 fatty acids (from fish or flax), whole vitamin C (from many fruits and vegetables), magnesium (from banana tea) and tulsi tea are also helpful.

Another key to our sleep is to ensure a diverse microbiome. The science world is exploding with research and discoveries about the little bugs that live in and on us. Our very life depends on their diversity. It turns out that our brain communicates directly with the microbes, which are essential for stimulating different hormones, like our appetite system. Check out the book “BrainMaker” by David Perlmutter for more on this fascinating subject.

Production of melatonin requires a diverse microbiome. Taking melatonin as a supplement is not a good long-term solution. When we take any hormone for too long, we adapt to it and we need an escalating amount to achieve the same effect. Ideally, we foster our innate production of melatonin. In any case, never take more than .5 to 1 mg of melatonin 90 minutes before bed to handle occasional jet lag or shift work needs.

When blood sugar drops in the night (from eating sweets in the evening) the adrenal glands are stimulated to stabilize the blood sugar. In order to produce cortisol, the adrenals can waken one in the night.

One of the best simple solutions to stimulate our natural melatonin production is to take a hot bath, then sleep in a cool room. Turn off all electrical devices at night!

**THIS MONTH’S CHALLENGE:** If you have sleep issues, set a higher priority for 4 out of the next 7 nights to follow a pattern of preparing for sleep by reducing stress, darkening the room, being careful with food choices in the evening, limiting screen time, etc. Notice if this helps or not. If not, speak to a health professional to learn more about how you can establish a healthier sleep cycle.

Avenues to Wellness was created especially for Inland Mendocino County by the Frank R. Howard Foundation. Visit www.avenuestowellness.org or email suzanne.avenuestowellness@gmail.com for more information.