You are listening to, you've got this episode 335. Welcome to You've Got This, a weekly podcast for higher education professionals looking to increase their confidence and capacity for juggling the day-to-day demands of an academic life. I'm your host, Dr. Katie Lender. On this episode, I thought I would share a little bit about some new, what I'm calling sleep basics.

And these are the things that I've built into my routine recently to improve the quality and the quantity of my sleep. Now, I think I've mentioned a couple different times on past episodes that I had started to have some challenges with sleep and um, I feel like this is one of those things that's a pretty good example of.

Something that like shifts and changes as we age and as we go through different kind of life experiences and seasons. And over the past six months or so, I was really starting to see some changes in my sleep that I did not want to have continue for the long term. Now part of this is because my job has been pretty intense lately, as I've previously talked about.

I got pulled into a really big project that was pretty stressful and it didn't allow me to take much time off and I felt like I was kind of revving pretty high, uh, most days trying to kind of. Figure out how to do this project that was pretty public in a way that, um, was good quality and, and that I was kind of giving my best, but I was starting to notice some things about my sleep that were concerning to me.

So I'm gonna talk a little bit about what those were. I'm gonna talk about what I did to make changes and then what the results were as well. So I also wanna just mention one of the most common questions that I get from people are, uh, do I sleep? Because, um, if you've known me for a while, if you've been listening to the show for a while, You know, I tend to keep myself pretty busy.

I have lots going on. Um, I have, you know, my full-time job, I have a side business. I do a lot of reading and, and I think sometimes people assume that I don't sleep. However, I actually think sleep is so, so important. This is actually one of the major ways that I manage my anxiety is by getting enough sleep.

Um, I also do that through diet and through other kinds of things, exercise obviously. Um, and I think that sleep is super important. So I would never sacrifice sleep intentionally. I would never like pull an all-nighter for something like that, is just not something I would ever do. So this is actually, um, in some ways like a testament to how important I think sleep is that I was really wanting to spend, uh, some energy and attention on this to make sure I was getting it right.

So here are the things that were kind of starting to stick out to me as a concern. I found that it was harder for me to fall asleep at night, which in the past has typically not been a problem. Typically, I, you know, my head hits the pillow and within like 10 minutes I'm able to fall asleep, and, and that was not always the case.

I also found myself because of that, staying up later than usual. And what I have found for me specifically is my ideal, um, time to go to bed is usually between eight and nine o'clock at night. For a relatively early wake up time of between four and five o'clock in the morning. Um, and so when I stay up later, it kind of shifts that whole trajectory for me in a way that just doesn't feel like it's like fitting what I would naturally want to do.

Now, here's the real problem that I was finding is that it was hard for me to stay asleep. So I was not sleeping through the night, and I would wake up in the middle of the night and then not be able to get back to sleep. So I was frequently waking up at like three o'clock in the morning and then not being able to get back to sleep.

Now you might be thinking, well, you said you get up at like four o'clock. Why is that such a big deal? But when I was going to bed later, I wasn't getting up at four o'clock. I was getting up at like five 30 or six. And so to wake up at three, I was actually losing quite a bit of sleep and I would often get up and, you know, like work or do whatever, but, um, or read or something like that.

But I wasn't actually getting the rest of sleep and, and so that was a concern for me. As I mentioned a couple of times previously, it was harder for me to take naps like on the weekend. I just couldn't turn off my brain to get enough rest, and I also found that when I was sleeping, I was having more anxiety dreams.

And these are the kinds of dreams where you just wake up feeling kind of stressed. They're not necessarily nightmares, but like if you've ever had that dream where. You're like back in high school and you're going in for a math test and you didn't study for it. I mean, like, this is the kind of dream that I'm talking about.

Uh, those like recurring anxiety dreams. I was having more of those. So once I started to see all of these things kind of stacking up, I was like, okay, what, what can I do? What are some things that I can take action on? Um, so these are the kinds of tools that I'm now using for sleep. One is I started to regularly use an I mask, and this was actually something I started doing a while ago, even as far back as like, um, when I was living in Kansas because my partner and I do have a television in our bedroom and he is a night owl.

And we'll sometimes watch shows with like, um, headphones on. And this helps me to shut out any light pollution if he's like watching TV while I'm going to sleep. So I will link to the eye mask that I use in the show notes. It's just like a simple cotton eye mask that you could just wash, you know, regularly.

And I found it to be, um, at this point, like I don't even realize that I'm like wearing it at night. It's not something the light keeps me awake. The second thing that I invested in is a white noise machine. And again, I can link to this in the show notes, the one that I use. But basically this also sh helps shut out any kind of noise pollution.

And in the place that I live, we live kind of close to a main road. So sometimes there's traffic noise, um, but I'm also a very kind of sensitive sleeper. So like if my partner's getting up and down, you know, in the middle of the night, um, to go downstairs or get a drink of water, whatever, like, I'm often gonna wake up to that.

So the white noise machine kind of. Helps me to not wake up, um, to little things that I might be hearing throughout the night. Now the other thing of course, is I got back to a regular early bedtime, so definitely before 9:00 PM but sometimes as early as like eight or eight 15. And this just really depends on like when I am naturally starting to feel tired, but because I'm back to a regular early morning wake up time between like four and four 30, it's completely normal for me to start to feel kind of tired around like seven 30 at night.

Um, okay. Now the other thing that I started to do was I ended up starting to take melatonin. Now this is something that I mentioned, I think, on my recent travel episode. Cause I took this with me when I traveled so well, from what I've read, and I will admit I haven't done like a deep, deep dive to research this.

Um, but I've read that you should take no more than like 10 milligrams at a time. And I started with 10 and I actually ended up cutting down to five because I found that, um, 10 was a little bit. Too much like I, I started to feel a little groggy. But, um, what I have read and, and based on the melatonin that I'm taking, um, you take it about 20 minutes before you want to fall asleep, and then it works for about four to five hours.

So what I will typically do is I will take one, um, in the evening, like about, you know, 20 to 30 minutes before I plan to fall asleep. And this is just like a little gummy, so you just like eat the little gummy and then I, you know, like brush my teeth and get ready for, for going to bed. And then if I wake up in the middle of the night, Sometimes I will take a, another melatonin, but this is very rare because what I've found is if I wake up in the middle of the night, um, by the time I take another one and then, then I am groggy in the morning.

So I would only do this if I like, don't have a, um, like a, an an alarm that I have to set in the morning, like on the weekends. Like I might take a second one, but in the week I, I just would kind of just, Given basically to, to either not getting sleep or, um, letting myself like naturally fall back asleep cuz I would rather not get sleep than, um, wake up groggy like that.

That feels harder to me for some reason. But I would say that even the melatonin I take earlier in the evening, it helps me to fall back asleep naturally. Like it, it's very rare that I've been consider taking more melatonin in the middle of the night. Um, now I will say some people may be listening to this and be thinking like, is this a real thing?

Like, is, is melatonin legit? I will say I have noticed a significant difference since I have started using it. And even if it's a placebo, it's working for me. So I, I don't really care all that much if it's like real or not real because for me, it's actually working to take this little five, five, uh, milligrams, uh, at night.

Um, okay. So then the next thing that I've added in that I think is also helping is I am now regularly exercising in the morning. Now this is something that I've been kind of on and off about, but since I got, uh, my Peloton bike, I have been doing, you know, 30 to 60 minutes each morning through either the bike, the, um, yoga strength workouts, you know, other things that I might do in the morning.

And I also am getting in more walking throughout the day because the weather here has just turned nicer, and so it's a lot easier for me to do like a walking meeting with a colleague or to do a walk at lunchtime. And there's a loop that I do around my campus that's about 25 minutes. So it works really well for if I'm walking with a colleague, like we can do it within a 30 minute meeting, or if I need to take a quick walk at lunch.

It definitely fits in within my lunch hour. And I guess I would say even after about seven to eight weeks of this routine of kind of regular exercise in the morning, I still feel like my body is kind of getting used to it. And so I am more physically tired by the end of the day just because I am, you know, using more energy through these workouts.

And then the other thing that I've been doing that I feel like has been a real game changer is I am doing nighttime meditations. So, um, I will just mention sleep meditations are so easy to find on a range of different apps. I do use Insight Timer. I also use the Peloton app for meditations and these kinds of nighttime meditations or sleep meditations, they basically just encourage, like deeper breathing.

And also some of them are really meant to help you, like clear out your brain at the end of the day and just kind of like, Empty yourself, you know, from thoughts before you're falling asleep. And I have found those two be having such a horrific effect for me. So, um, like the, the other night I went to bed a little later than normal.

I was like, it was like 8 45, it's like nearing my bedtime. And I had my phone out and my partner was like, aren't you going to sleep? Like, why do you have your phone out? And I said, oh, I'm gonna do a meditation. And he kind of gave me a look and I said, look, you know, like if you, if you watch me do this meditation in like seven minutes, I'm basically gonna be a falling asleep because it is so, um, like, it just works so well for me to, to listen to these meditations and like the deep breathing.

And I, I use a weighted blanket as well, and it is just, you know, the easiest thing in the world for me to fall asleep. So, um, nighttime meditations for the win. So with all of those different things, here are the results that I have been experiencing. I am definitely sleeping through the night more regularly, which feels like a huge win.

I do feel like it is easier to fall back asleep if I do wake up in the middle of the night, which again, another huge win. I'm getting to bed on time regularly, I would say I'm sleeping about seven to eight hours a night, pretty consistently. Waking up naturally between four and 5:00 AM I always set my morning alarm for like five 30 just in case, you know, my body feels like it needs a little extra sleep.

And I never wake up to the alarm. I am always waking up beforehand, which feels like a good sign, you know, that I'm getting the rest that I need. Um, I have had a few really nice weekend naps, which is a great sign that I'm kind of quieting my mind and getting that extra rest. And also I have found that I've had more neutral dreams.

I am not having those anxiety dreams. Um, it, it is such a high proportion of what I had been seeing them happening before. So, um, I feel like it's working, which is why I wanted to podcast about it. I, I will link to the things that I'm trying that, um, I can link to in the show notes. I'll link to the melatonin gummies as well, just in case you're interested.

Um, but I have just found these things to be so helpful. So I am curious as always, what are some of the sleep practices that you have found helpful? You can always email me at hello dr katie linder.com. I always love to hear from you. And of course, I am always wishing that you are getting the sleep that you need as well, and the rest that you need to be at your best, and I would love to hear the kinds of things you're doing to make that happen.

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