



Laugh!

Laugh. In one study conducted at Loma Linda University's Center for Neuroimmunology in California, a group of men who watched a funny video were shown to have 30% less cortisol in their blood and significantly lower levels of another stress hormone, epinephrine, during and after the tape compared with a group that sat quietly. Lighten up your commute with a cassette or CD of your favorite comedian or a humorous book on tape. Keep an eye out for funny newspaper headlines or ads. And, of course, make it a point to watch movies that make you laugh.

Get a massage. Deep-pressure massage stimulates the nerves that cause our levels of the stress hormones cortisol and epinephrine to go down, while the levels of two mood-regulating brain chemicals that act like the hormones serotonin and dopamine rise. This was true in studies of breast cancer patients conducted at the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine, and of women with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome. Both groups reported reduced anxiety and depression and improved mood and quality of life. Research also shows that folks who *give* a massage reduce their own levels of stress hormones.

Make love. The more we do, the more endorphins our brains release. These "neuro-hormones"—chemicals released in the brain during exercise and, yes, after sex—are natural painkillers and also help to alleviate anxiety.

GET A GOOD NIGHT'S REST WEEK 2

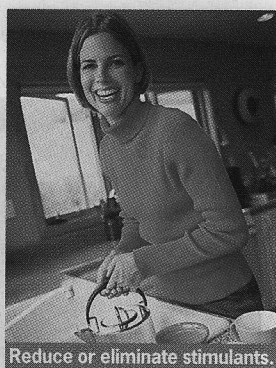
Besides making you cranky, one theory is that sleep loss (less than 8 hours of sleep a night) may contribute to weight gain by dramatically disrupting the hormones that control your eating



Get outside!



Make your bedroom dark.



Reduce or eliminate stimulants.

habits and your metabolism.

In one small study, researchers in the University of Chicago's department of medicine compared the hormone levels of 11 men while they got 8 hours of sleep for several nights, followed by several nights of a mere 4 hours in bed. During the sleep-debt stage, the men's ability to process glucose was impaired as much as a person with type 2 diabetes—indicating that sleep debt could lead to insulin resistance, a condition some experts think encourages obesity. In all the afternoons that followed a sleep-deprived night, the men also had consistently elevated levels of cortisol, which encourages your cells to store more fat, particularly when paired with insulin resistance. Not to mention the fact that levels of thyroid hormone, the metabolism powerhouse, were lowered during sleep deprivation.

Whether you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, these expert tips should help:

Get outside. The release of hormones in your brain is regulated by the nerve

impulses sent by your retinas in response to light. In other words, living by the earth's natural cycle of light and darkness keeps your serotonin and cortisol at their proper levels. Getting at least 30 minutes of natural light a day helps reset our inner alarm clocks, so we'll want to fall asleep at the right time, says Joyce Walsleben, PhD, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at New York University in New York City and author of *A Woman's Guide to Sleep: Guaranteed Solutions for a Good Night's Rest* (Crown Publishing Group Inc., 2000).

Take a walk. In one study of more than 700 people, those who took daily walks were one-third less likely to have trouble sleeping until their normal wake-up time. Those who walked *briskly* slashed the risk of any sleep disorder by half. Regular exercise alleviates stress and also raises body temperature, which primes us for slumber.

Reduce or eliminate stimulants, such as caffeinated coffee, tea, soda, chocolate, and nicotine, before going to bed. Also,