Make your 2020 Resolutions Restolutions!

Stick to these 5 “rest-o-lutions” and you should have a nice foundation to build on this year.

January 4, 2020 By Michael Breus, PhD

Happy New Year, I hope you’ll make all your 2020 resolutions, RestOLutions. If you haven’t seen my Restlolutions series on Instagram, be sure to check them out.

I’m beginning the year after having just returned from Asia.

This trip was a twist on how my family and I normally spend the holidays, but it was certainly worthwhile and made for a trip we’ll never forget. Getting to spend one on one time with my daughter who is in China as an exchange student and see how she’s grown and can speak the language so fluently was so great to see.

There were a number of highlights I could spend the day telling you about. There were two in particular I want to mention, before sharing a few tips to help you sleep better this year.

The first, and perhaps most incredible part of our trip, was seeing the Terra Cotta Warriors. We saw them early on in a town in southeast China. These are remarkable clay sculptures that are more than 2,000 years old, yet were only discovered in 1974. The warriors, varying in height according to their military rank, were buried in the tomb of the first Emperor of China. Their mission? To protect the emperor in his afterlife. There were *thousands* of clay soldiers, and the detail in their uniforms and faces was extraordinary. I highly recommend checking them out if you have a chance.

Another standout from the trip was later heading to Khao Phing Kan, an island off the coast of Thailand. Since the ’70s, it’s been known as “James Bond Island,” after it was prominently featured in “The Man With the Golden Gun.” You don’t need to be a film buff to enjoy this island, though. It’s green, it’s warm, and a stunning 66-foot limestone rock prominently rises from the turquoise water not far from the sandy beach. Not to mention, the ice cream was amazing. My family and I loved just relaxing on the beach and recharging our batteries for 2020.

I should also mention here that the Timeshifter app worked perfectly for my 13-hour flight from Los Angeles to Beijing. By using the app two days before we left, it allowed my body’s internal circadian rhythm to be easily adjusted — meaning I experienced no jet lag and was able to make the most of my time overseas.

And to counteract the lack of sunlight exposure in winter, I brought my Journi light box along (if you are interested in one of these, the code BREUS25 was still working as of the time of this writing to take 25% off). This helped me wake up, turn off the melatonin faucet, and get some extra energy when needed.

I've heard from a number of clients that they want to make getting a good night's sleep a priority in 2020. I think that's a great goal, especially when considering sleep plays a key role in reaching many of our resolutions. Whether it's losing weight or being more alert at work, improving your sleep habits can help you hit the mark.

To help you get there, I have 5 easy "rest-o-lutions" you can make:\

1) Limit Blue Light Before Bed

This is a topic I've touched on several times in the past. Too much light, particularly before going to bed, can seriously disrupt our sleep. And blue light in particular, which radiates from our phone and tablet screens, can be a major problem.

The important thing to remember is that blue light delays the production of melatonin, an essential hormone that helps us fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer. I know it can be hard to avoid using your phone before going to sleep, but limiting blue light exposure 90 minutes to two hours before bed will significantly boost the quality of your sleep.

To combat the negative effects of blue light, I developed a line of blue light-blocking eyeglasses. If you know you'll be tempted to look at a screen before bed, anytime in that two hour window, just put these on and wear them until you go to bed. Problem solved!

2) Remember, Your Diet Impacts Your Sleep

What you eat — and when you eat it — influences your sleep. There are some obvious steps you can make, like avoiding caffeine before going to bed, that will serve you well.

But what about foods that support better sleep? This year, adding more cherries to your diet could be of benefit. Cherries are one of the few sources of melatonin in food, making it one of the top fruits when it comes to fostering a good night's sleep. Almonds and fatty fish like salmon, tuna and trout have also been found to be excellent sleep aids.

Carbohydrates can be helpful, but the type of carbs matter here. Sugar, for instance, has been linked to insomnia. Researchers last month — after looking at the diets of 5,000 people — found certain carbs cause a rapid increase in blood sugar and may trigger insomnia.

But there are also carbs that help increase your body's serotonin production. Serotonin plays a critical role in regulating the body's sleep-wake cycles and helps promote restful sleep. Some of the carbs that help here include brown rice, quinoa, and sweet potatoes.

3) Listen to Soothing Music at Night

The music you listen to can profoundly impact your sleep. That's because music, depending on the rhythm and tempo, sways how our body and mind feel. In 2020, finding time to listen to soothing music before you go to bed is something you should certainly work into your routine.

There are a number of ways soothing music contributes to better sleep, including: lowering your heart rate, reducing stress and anxiety, and easing muscle tension. Soothing music also promotes the release of serotonin. These are all positive outcomes that promote quality sleep.

4) Monitor the Temperature

Your sleep environment is an essential component of a good night's rest. So you've probably noticed that when your room is hot and stuffy, it makes it that much tougher for you to fall asleep.

That's because our bodies need to cool down as we're going to bed. Our bodies naturally work to lower our body temperature when we go to bed because it helps us fall asleep faster. You can help yourself out, though, by monitoring the thermostat before calling it a night. Research has shown that 60 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit is ideal for sleep. Find the cool temperature that suits you best and stick with it in 2020. You'll likely notice that when you're cooler at night, you end up falling asleep faster — and reaching REM sleep faster, too.

5) Avoid Exercising Late at Night

I'll admit, this has been a tough one for me to stick to. Sometimes it feels good to miss the post-work rush at the gym and go a little later at night, once it's cleared up. But working out late at night comes with a cost.

Your body temperature remains elevated for about four hours after you've finished working out. And as we just touched on, you want your body temperature to be decreasing as you approach your bedtime. Exercising too soon before going to bed counteracts your body's natural rhythm and can stifle productive sleep.

The best time to exercise depends on your chronotype. Still, refraining from working out within four hours of going to bed is a good move for all chronotypes.

Okay, stick to those 5 "rest-o-lutions" and you should have a nice foundation to build on this year. I'm looking forward to another great year and am excited to have you following along. Thanks for reading and I'll talk to you again next week.

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