



Let's talk about sleep

Sleep influences everything from mood, motivation, decision making and resilience but how often do we take it for granted as a key way to improve our weightlifting performance? Nick Littlehales, International Elite Sport Sleep Coach, brings you some important information on how sleep can impact your performance.

Adopting a 24/7 behavioural approach

It really should not come as any surprise that after decades, even centuries, of no sleep education that we still adopt a human mantra of 'take it for granted'. As a result, how well we sleep and recover is not, even today, considered a performance criteria whether you're in the ring, on the track, or behind the bar. If we learnt the basics at school, we would all realise that it is *the* most important human health pillar.

A far more effective and proven approach is to improve our understanding of sleep. We need to debunk it, redefine it and adopt practical, achievable steps to fully reveal this natural human recovery process.

Let's redefine sleep

Sleep Redefined = Mental & Physical Human Recovery Resilience

Sleep influences everything from mood, motivation, decision making and resilience, understanding our optimum 24/7 approach should be the key health pillar priority.

Research has already and continues to reveal that sleep deprivation has a major impact on mental fitness and wellbeing. Actual or perceived low impact levels of recovery will affect:

- our ability to process information,
- our emotional response to required tasks,
- mood,
- motivation,
- the ability to learn new skills,
- decisions making,
- reaction times,
- awareness,
- alertness,
- stamina,
- relationships.



And yet for many of us we think it's just something we do to get through to the next day.

As we roll through the key sleep stages in cycles, our brain has the ability to catch up, [regenerate- rejuvenate] prioritise and file all the information (both positive and negative), that we have been exposed to during the day.

If our brains are not able to reveal the key sleep quality stages in cycles, while we are in a perceived sleep state, then ongoing mental functioning decreases nearly twice as fast as physical performance.

As a result, although we may feel or are able to shift to being physically functional the following day, it's likely that we won't be able to recall everything that we learned the previous day and may struggle to make effective decisions. We feel an increased perception of effort and fatigue kicks in quicker. It also impacts our mood and motivation, which become imbalanced.

Stress

Levels of the stress hormone cortisol can also rise, which decreases our ability to stay and remain calm in challenging situations. Ever noticed how short tempered you are after pulling an all nighter or getting a bad night's sleep?

In our attempt to sleep and overcome fatigue to get the sleep our body and mind so desperately needs, we may consider a new mattress, a pillow, changing our diet, using herbal or medical supplements, sleeping tablets, increasing caffeine or alcohol intake, grab a tracker or Sleep App. The list is endless.

In principle however, in isolation and used randomly these interventions can develop other counterproductive side effects. They may even promote more consistent periods of insomnia.

Our ability to recover both mentally and physically is under new, ever increasing pressures in today's society. This includes behavioural changes driven by technology and the 24/7 world we are immersed in.

So, there's never been a better time to raise our awareness, redefine our approach on why, when and how we sleep.

Redefining your everyday recovery approach starts with understanding that as humans we should be synchronised with the Circadian Rhythms. This sunrise sunset, light, dark and temperature process is key to optimising human functionality. If we combine this, with the knowledge that pre-electric light, humans adopted a multiphasic sleep wake cycle, not just one nocturnal block (Monophasic) we have the answers on how we can redefine our sleep approach.



Key Sleep Recovery Indicators

The 7 Key Sleep Recovery Indicators (KSRI) are the building blocks of the R90 Technique, combining practical and achievable behaviour step changes that could change your recovery world and make you feel like a superhuman every single day. **Adopting even just one of them could go a long way to improving your life, sleep and recovery.**

1. A circadian rhythm is a 24-hour internal cycle managed by our body clock deep within the brain. Regulating our internal systems such as sleeping, eating patterns, hormone production, mood and motivation.

2. A Chronotype is your genetic sleeping characteristic – Are you a morning lark or night owl type of person? Which one you are determines your ideal sleep/wake timings and when ideally to perform high and low intensity mental and physical activities.

- It's easy to check your Chronotype and can be a sleep game changer.

3. Rethink sleep as 90-minute cycles, not hours. This is the length of time it takes a human under clinical conditions to go through the five key recovery stages and phases.

- Start with your most consistent wake time to break your 24 hours up into 16 stages and timings. 5 cycles a day = 7.5 hours - 35 across 7 days. Read more [here](#).

4. With a consistent wake time in place, the post sleep 90-minute period is key to performance throughout the day and into the next sleep period.

- Create time to expose yourself to light inside or outside (seasonally dependent) to trigger all of your natural, hormones, bodily functions and kick start the day.

5. Being **recovery active** is key to personal performance, and both short and longer term success. Recovery, REDEFINED REVEALS higher levels of productivity, prevents wasting valuable time sleeping without benefits and PROTECTS you from adopting negative behavioural steps to overcome fatigue.

6. Humans are designed to sleep anywhere, anytime on and with anything. The environment you choose to sleep in or have to sleep in wants to reflect our natural relationship with sensory familiarisation, light to dark, warm to cool.

7. When it comes to choosing products to sleep on and with its simple.



- You just need to layer up to promote an ideal sleeping position of foetal on the opposite side to your dominant side, very shallow pillow or no pillow, easy care allergenic bedding and ignore the exaggerated unrealistic marketing claims

Taking control of your sleep

Think in cycles and not hours. The R90 Technique simply means recovery in 90-minutes. 90-minutes is the length of time it takes a person (under clinical conditions) to go through the key recovery stages. Our sleep cycles are composed of four (sometimes five) distinct stages.

Think of sleep in cycles per week and not hours per night. All of a sudden, one bad night out of seven doesn't seem too bad. We immediately take the pressure off, because it isn't an all-or-nothing 8 hours per night. Everything isn't riding on tonight.

Instead, someone who needs 5 cycles a night [adding up to 7.5 hours] is aiming for 35 per week. If we can get at least four nights in a week of an ideal sleep routine, then we're doing OK.

Most importantly, we're aware of how much sleep we're getting. It is empowering for anyone to take control of their sleep like this, and it is possible to start manipulating cycles in the short term to free up more time for a specific event or period in our lives as part of a controlled regime change.

Five 90-minute cycles adding up to 7.5 hours is considered to be an optimum period for a healthy adult.

How do I manage daytime slumps?

Daytime slumps are simply natural human recovery periods revealing themselves (Midday Siesta for example) Wake, daytime fatigue develops because we try to grab all of recovery in one block and ignore the fact we are designed to recover in shorter periods more often. Twice (Biphasic) three times (Triphasic) in any 24 hours.

It's more natural for humans to sleep, recover in a Polyphasic manner, in principle shorter periods more often, rather than just one nocturnal block Monophasic [the eight hour in one block generation]

Identify and keep a constant wake time: break your 24 hours up into sixteen 90-minute time phases and focus on your first 90 minutes post sleep. Take plenty of short 2/5 minute distractive brain breaks every 90 minutes, take a 20-30 minute midday or late afternoon nap... Or as we refer to it in sport a Controlled Recovery Period (CRP), vacant mind space me time and take the pressure off your 24/7.



Controlled Recovery Periods (CRP)

'Snoozers for losers' is a phrase most definitely for a past generation.

As we've discussed, taking your recovery in cycles rather than hours, taking short distractive breaks every 90 minutes, factoring in a 30/20/15 minute CRP midday to early evening and creating some vacant mind space creates a positive mindset of not worrying about sleep.

Recovery is a 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week commitment. Through using the daylight hours in addition to your nocturnal approach you will be able to give your mind and body the opportunity to continually reboot while dealing with the demands of modern life.

The power of the nap

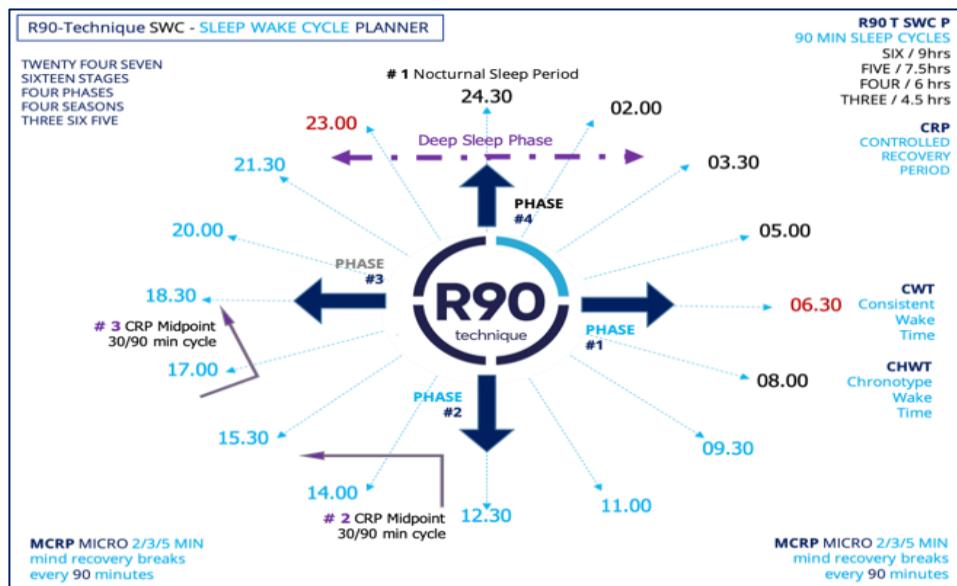
The power of napping cannot be ignored. Naps are a significant personal performance enhancer for athletes, and can have the same benefits for anyone. If you find you are struggling throughout the day, add in a 30 – 90 minute Controlled Recovery Period (CRP), otherwise known as a nap, between 1-3p.m. or 5-7p.m.

In a recent study published in the European Journal of Sports Science, researchers found that elite athletes were able to take daytime naps and not suffer any adverse effects on their nocturnal sleep. This kind of nap is known as 'appetitive' – taken not to compensate for sleep loss, but from an appetite to sleep owing to training induced fatigue. Participants had their level of tiredness measured before their naps, and how long they took to get to sleep was recorded. The scientists found that, of the participants, elite athletes drifted off faster and did not need to be feeling tired to nap.

Create Your Own Sleep Wake Cycle Planner

Screen grab this example, create your own graphic or go old school with pencil and paper. Identify what your most natural wake time would be if you were in full control and use that to break down your 24 hour clock into 16 x 90 minute periods/timings.

This example is a morning AMer chronotype 06.30am wake / start the day approach



Now you can use your planner to apply training, sessions, events, occupational and social schedules a proven technique helping you establish when you can apply your sleep cycles, CRPs and mind breaks. Adapt with confidence if things outside of your control crop up.

Remember your ability to sleep, reveal more consistent, sustainable levels of recovery is all about the rolling 24/7 circadian rhythms of your day. In particular, exposure to light at the right times in the four phases of every day. This is key to your own personal performance, as well as protecting yourself, is creating as much rhythm, pattern and harmony in your 24/7.

Make Your R90-T Work For You

KSRI 1. Circadian Rhythms

This 24-hour cycle regulates our biological and physiological functions. Our body clock regulates our internal systems such as sleeping, eating patterns, hormone production, temperature, alertness, mood and is principally set and reset by daylight, diminished light and dark. [Sunrise - Sunset]

In principle humans living outside would be active in 80,000/100,000 Lux [Daylight] with an average exposure of 10/20,000 Lux season and activity dependent.

When daylight enters our eyelids in the morning (the first phase of our human day) the brain starts to produce the hormone serotonin, which activates all the things that were suppressed for sleep – mood, motivation, appetite, bowel and bladder.



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As the afternoon, second phase draws on and light levels diminish, the brain produces melatonin. This begins to suppress these things, slowly shutting us down in preparation to enter a sleep state.

Melatonin will also be produced if there's not enough natural light entering the eye for several hours, inducing feelings of drowsiness and lack of energy and motivation.

For many, even in elite sport, the light exposure is too low throughout the first two phases of the 24 hour cycle. To remain alert and energised, therefore, it's important to find opportunities to get outside first thing in the morning and at intervals throughout the four phases of the day, or to use daylight therapy tools.

Nick Littlehales is an International Elite Sport Sleep Coach, recognised as the world's first with 35 years industry experience and over two decades dedicated to elite sport. Founder of the game changing R90 Technique now recognised as a ground-breaking approach in human recovery. Nick's, unique, passionate and proven techniques are endorsed and recommended by leading athletes, sport science professionals, managers, coaches and organisations in world sport.

An International best-selling author of SLEEP published in 15 countries worldwide, which means this unique R90 Technique is being adopted, by anyone who sleeps worldwide.

To find out more about the R90 program and Nick's work, visit his website:

www.SPORTSLEEPCOACH.COM

Elite Sport Sleep Coach Since 1998