

Sleeping Now

Category: Stress and Burnout

written by Julie A. Dickson | June 24, 2022

"I can't sleep," I repeatedly told my PCP. I told him I would lie in bed at night, my mind racing from one topic to another: work, errands, kids, pets, yardwork. I would turn the light back on and play solitaire until my eyes were blurry, then give sleeping another try. Getting up at 4:00 a.m. was usual for me, which meant getting to sleep between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. was essential.

On my PCP's advice, I gave up caffeine completely, took melatonin, meditated and relaxed, took evening walks, and read a book instead of watching television after supper. Nothing made any difference. Some nights I would still be awake at 11:00 p.m., worrying about how tired I was going to feel the following day. My job was very high-paced and stressful: ringing phones, demands from vendors and clients, deliveries, medical supply shortages, and delays all had me running ragged. The 40-minute drive home, listening to an audiobook, would usually calm me down, but I'd still run scenarios through my head, trying to solve crises in my sleep, even dreaming of my job when I did sleep.

Then the pandemic struck. My office closed, and I was at home permanently. I didn't have the type of job that I could do from home, so I retired early, one year ahead of schedule. I started walking in the mornings, didn't dress until 9:00 a.m., read more books, got in touch with friends. The change wasn't immediate, but I started sleeping better.

When my doctor saw me six months after I'd retired, he almost didn't recognize me, saying I looked so relaxed. It was my highly stressful job. Not only had I been not sleeping, it was literally taking years off my life. I had been living, breathing, and not-sleeping stress. Once the realization hit, I wondered how I had managed it for over 15 years. I had never once thought of leaving the high-stress position I was in, but now that two years have passed, I know the stress was really killing me. I'm sleeping now.

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