Health, wellness, weight loss & weight management is multi-faceted. One often overlooked but crucial component is sleep. Discussed briefly in the "Being Accountable & Overcoming Obstacles" segment, evaluate whether your exhaustion is nutritionally related, such as: Do you skip breakfast? Do you run on sugar & caffeine instead of protein & complex carbs when you’re busy? Or if your fatigue is mental, such as: related to stress or depression? Or are unhealthy or inadequate sleep habits exacerbating feeling tired or even the causative factor? Life happens, whether you want it to or not & sometimes things will get in the way of your intentions. Between work, the grocery store, home, the gym, errands & our kid's schedules, our days are longer & our sleep is shorter. Often, sleep is one of the first things to be sacrificed, but science is increasingly showing that the quality of your sleep directly affects the quality of your waking life, including mental sharpness, productivity, emotional balance, physical vitality & workout performance, weight loss & weight management as well as risk factors for obesity. And studies show that not getting enough sleep or poor quality sleep on a regular basis increases the risk of developing high blood pressure, heart disease & other detrimental medical conditions.

Your brain & body functions stay active throughout sleep, processing information & memories, carrying out biological maintenance & works to repair the body of all the damage that it experienced during the day. Sleep deprivation, or sleep debt, can interfere with the cellular functions of the body. This includes hormonal imbalances that can lead to a multitude of problems including: poor stress management, altered metabolism, increased risk factors for developing diabetes due to poor regulation of blood sugar, loss of muscle mass & less effective muscle recovery following exercise, even tendencies towards eating foods that are high in calories & carbohydrates during waking hours. Sleep needs vary from person to person, & they change throughout the life cycle. Most adults need 7-8 hours of sleep each night, encompassing 5 stages & a complex 90 minute cycle that repeats throughout the night.

Muscle development & sleep are interdependent, meaning not ignoring the pillow is an integral aspect of the fitness equation because muscle development doesn’t occur instantaneously during a workout but rather during the rest period that follows, which includes while you are asleep. Restorative sleep is essential for muscle growth & recovery, boosting muscle mass and repair of cells & tissues because training breaks down muscle tissues. Adequate rest repairs them & it is when muscles are repaired & built back up that you have muscle toning & strength gains. Neglecting this repair process can be a hindrance to meeting your goals because if you don’t give your body enough time to carry out this process, you may not see the muscle recovery required, leaving your workout performance lacking going into the next workout & therefore slows the rate of progress down.

Although you may not be able to control all of the factors that interfere with sleep, you can adopt habits that develop healthy sleep. As you start getting the sleep you need, your energy & efficiency will go up. In fact, you're likely to find that you actually get more done during the day than when you were skimping on sleep.

Stick to a consistent sleep schedule & create a restful sleeping environment: Just as it is recommended to maintain a consistent eating schedule so you don’t get hungry & overeat or so your body has enough fuel for exercise, you should maintain a consistent sleeping schedule so you don’t feel exhausted & struggle to complete daily tasks or feel incapable of accomplishing your workout. Go to bed & get up at the same time every day, even weekends or days off. Being consistent reinforces your body’s sleep/wake cycle, helping you
fall asleep & stay asleep for the night. Incorporate a relaxing routine before bedtime (reading, a warm bath, yoga, soothing music or dimmed lighting) and build a relaxing environment (room-darkening shades, comfortable bedding, ear plugs, a fan, etc) which can ease the transition between wakefulness & drowsiness. Avoid electronic devices/computer (the particular type of light emanating from the screen is activating to the brain), eliminate distractions such as the TV & integrate setting limits for children or pets in bed.

✓ **Be aware of what you eat & drink:** Eat 'light & right' in the evening to avoid discomfort from being over full or indigestion that may interfere with falling asleep. Limit fluid intake in the evening as trips to the bathroom disrupt the sleep cycles. Avoid nicotine & caffeine due to the stimulating effects & alcohol can keep you in the lighter stages of sleep or you may wake in the middle of the night when the sedating effects have worn off.

✓ **Limit daytime naps:** Or at least limit yourself to 10-30 minutes and make it during the mid-afternoon if you feel you absolutely need to nap that day. Daylight is also involved in regulating sleep patterns, so get at least 15-30 minutes of sunlight every morning.

✓ **Include physical activity in your daily routine:** Tossing & turning in the middle of the night is not a suitable form of exercise. Regular physical activity can promote improved sleep, helping you fall asleep faster as well as sleep deeper. Timing is important though & is important to finish your workout a few hours before bed.

✓ **Attempt to manage stress:** When you have too much to do or too much to think about, your sleep is likely to suffer. Start with management basics like getting organized, setting priorities, delegate tasks & take a break when you need one. Before bed, write down what's on your mind & then set it aside for tomorrow.

✓ **Know when to contact your doctor:** Nearly everyone has an occasional sleepless night, but if you often have trouble sleeping, consistently find yourself feeling tired or not well rested despite spending enough time in bed at night, don’t hesitate to speak with your doctor. Some prescribed medications, as well as some over-the-counter medications can disrupt sleep patterns. Identifying & treating any underlying causes can help you get the sleep you deserve, so you may want to consider using a sleep journal to better evaluate patterns or issues.

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