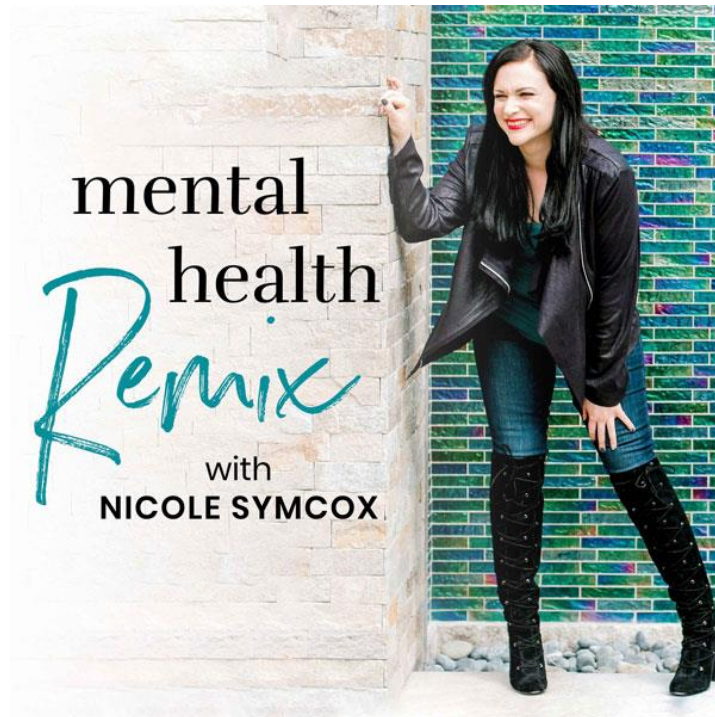


Ep #53: The Importance of Sleep



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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When you're overthinking before bed, sometimes, it's a really good technique to just take 10 or 15 minutes and just write down everything that your brain is thinking about. So, you just write out everything that you should have done today, everything that you should do tomorrow, and you just get it out on paper.

Sometimes, what happens is the brain's like, "Okay, cool, you heard me. You understand that we have things to do. I'm going to leave you alone now."

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey, everyone. Welcome to episode 53. So, I want to talk to you today about the importance of sleep. Which probably seems like a super-random topic. But sleep is essential to our wellbeing as humans. And unfortunately, when we are wrestling with anxiety or when we're constantly stressed out, it's really difficult to sleep.

And so, once that pattern sets in of not being able to sleep really well or losing a lot of sleep, we start performing not at our best. We start not showing up as our best selves. We're agitated. We're irritated. And of course, the normal stressors don't stop.

Like, the stressors just keep piling up and you're just less emotionally, mentally, physically available to deal with them because you're so worn out by not sleeping. So, of course, if you are having severe insomnia or you've been having difficulty sleeping for a long time, you should definitely talk to your doctor about that because there might be some tips that they have for

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you, or maybe there's a medication of some kind. But it's definitely worth a conversation with your primary care physician if you are having a lot of difficulty sleeping.

But there's a lot of things that go into troubles with sleep in general. So, we'll just cover a few of them here in this episode and give you some tips on how to get some sleep. So, first of all, if you are living in chronic stress, you're probably feeling wired and tired. And that's a very common term used to describe when we are living in chronic stress. And hello, 2020 is the definition of chronic stress.

So, for a lot of us, we might be noticing that we're more wired and tired than we normally are. And so, I want to encourage you with this that it is super-important to manage your stress levels and it is incredibly doable, but it takes some strategic effort.

And so, one of the things that goes out the window when we're super-stressed is sleep. Our eating tends to get dysregulated. Our sleep gets dysregulated. Our relationships start to feel more difficult or more challenging. And so, we really want to do what we can to get your parasympathetic nervous system to kick on.

Now, that's the part of your nervous system that refreshes you, that makes you feel like you got a good night's sleep or, you know, you got to rest. This is part of you that relaxes itself. And it's really important that you get moments in time, even if it's just for five minutes a day. But you need increments of time for this part of your nervous system to kick on and give your body rest.

And so, if you're having trouble sleeping, like if your body is not doing this – because your parasympathetic nervous system is supposed to kick on at night when you are sleeping. That is what contributes to restful sleep. But if you're really wrestling with a lot of stress or anxiety, there's a high chance you're not getting restful sleep and therefore that part of your nervous

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system isn't kicking on like it should and you're starting to feel worn down as a result.

So, if you're having a lot of disrupted sleep, you want to make it part of your rhythm to incorporate activities in your day. Again, this can be five minutes at a time or 30 minutes at a time, whatever time increment you want to choose for yourself, but an opportunity for you to get that part of your nervous system to turn on.

So, usually, it is a sensory experience that allows for this refresh to take place in your body. So, you're looking for an activity that sort of calms your brain, calms your body, and gives you a little bit of peace and rest, again, even if it's only for like five minutes. That's a positive deposit in your nervous system and we want that, especially when we're stressed, wired and tired, and we're not sleeping really good.

So, sensory experiences can look something like sounds. So, maybe for you it's ocean sounds. Maybe for you it's the sound of nature Maybe it's birds. Whatever it may be, maybe it's classical music, I don't really know what it is for you. But explore and decide, you know, what is a sensory experience from an auditory place that, when you hear something, it immediately has a calming visceral reaction for your body.

Because that will give you just a break, and your body just needs breaks, especially if you're not sleeping really well and getting this automatically at night. So, that's definitely one way.

The other thing is exercise is known to really help with sleep at night. And it also releases endorphins. So, getting that endorphin hit, so to speak, is really, really helpful for regulating stress because the body can experience a positive chemical experience in your body. That's what endorphins are. They're like the happy chemical.

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And when you exercise – and it doesn't matter. It doesn't have to be hardcore. It doesn't have to be intense. It can be a very brisk walk. It's just whatever kind of brings that sensation of wellbeing to you is well worth your time. And we all know that exercise is also a stress release, especially if you're doing cardio or strength lifting while you're thinking about the thing that's making you angry or stressed out and just kind of getting some of that energy out while you're engaging in exercise.

So, that's another example of something that you can do. The other thing that really disrupts sleep and creates monuments of stress is overthinking. If you have an anxious brain, you know this. So, definitely hit up my episode where I talk about grounding yourself in anxiety because I go through the five, four, three, two, one technique, which is just a way that when you are really triggered in that moment, to just bring yourself back down to baseline and being able to breathe and being able to ground yourself in the moment so that you can move onto the next thing.

And so, overthinking, of course, is an absolute sleep killer. I mean, how many of us are, like, fine during the day, then our heads hit the pillow and we literally have a to-do list? We're thinking about all the things we need to do tomorrow; we're thinking about all the things we didn't do today and it's just a big shit-on-ourselves session and we're supposed to be sleeping.

Which then pisses us off even more because we're like, "Fuck, I'm supposed to be sleeping and all I'm doing is thinking about what I should have done or what I could have done and what I should do tomorrow," right? It's not a good place to be in.

Then, we try to distract ourselves, we usually go on our phones or social media or tech or TV or whatever. The problem with that is blue light definitely interrupts our ability to get restful sleep. It makes our brain think that it's time to be awake, that we need to be alert and we need to be awake. So, you can see why doing this at night wouldn't be a great thing to do when you are trying to sleep.

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So, definitely, if you're going to go on any devices, make sure that you have the settings set to warm. Because if you have more of that yellow filter that shows up, it blocks out some of the blue light. Or if you have blue light glasses, that can be helpful too, just to sort of filter out some of the blue light that's telling your brain to stay awake and be awake. Because, when we're trying to sleep, we don't need any of that shit.

So, we want to create everything that we can to be working for us. And so, when you're overthinking before bed, sometimes it's a really good technique to just take 10 or 15 minutes and just write down everything that your brain is thinking about. So, you just write out everything that you should have done today, everything you should do tomorrow. And you just get it out on paper.

Sometimes, what happens is the brain is like, "Okay, cool, you heard me, you understand that we have things to do. I'm going to leave you alone now." Now, not always, it's not a perfect science, but it's definitely worth giving a shot to see if it works.

I've heard from a lot of people that once they take all of the – I'll call it a circus – the circus that is going on in their brains before going to bed, it's just on and on, round and round, and putting it onto paper, sometimes they can hit the pillow and actually go to sleep. But there is something about constantly ruminating and overthinking about it in our brains without writing it down that sort of keeps it going. And not just for a little while, but for hours.

So, we want to interrupt this process because once your brain gets stuck in a rumination loop, it can be really hard to get out of it just by thinking. Sometimes, we have to do something to interrupt the pattern that's getting put in place. So, sometimes, writing that out can definitely be helpful.

Now, the other thing is you need to really filter what you're putting in your brain before you go to bed. And this counts, like, an hour, two hours – it

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depends on how you work as a human, like, how you are. Some people, it takes them two hours to wind down for bed. Some people, they fall asleep the second their head hits the pillow and then they wake up at midnight.

You just have to know who you are and how you work best, which is something I'm always empowering you with. Like, get curious about yourself and start to wonder, you know, what works best for me. But stary getting nighttime routines put in place.

Like, do you need to have a cup of chamomile tea 30 minutes before you know you're going to hit the pillow? Do you need to stay away from reading any kind of news story that's going to be triggering, or watching any kind of show, entertaining or not?

So, a show that maybe stresses you out, but also a show that really excites you. You have to remember; the body doesn't know the difference between excitement and stress. It processes it the same. So, if you watch a show that gets you really excited and amped up and you love, love, love it, right before bed, you might have accidentally keyed yourself up.

So, you maybe want to save that show for earlier on in the evening when you have a few more hours to wind down. But if you're going to watch a show or engage in anything tech or be online or whatever, maybe do something that feels really brainless that doesn't really trigger overthinking, doesn't really trigger your emotions, it's just sort of this bland activity as you wind yourself down.

You'd be surprised, there is a fair amount of people out there who need a full hour just to wind down to be ready for bed. And so, you can also consider if showers are something that relax you, there's a fair amount of people out there that showers are very relaxing. And for other people, they like taking showers in the morning because they're invigorating. Figure out who you are on that.

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If showers are invigorating to you, like, definitely keep them in the morning. But if you notice that water is really calming to you, water is really soothing, especially if it's warm water, then maybe showers are something that are more soothing at night. And then you can pop some lavender oil or eucalyptus or something inside the shower to give yourself more of a sensory experience on top of just feeling the warm water. You can smell a good smell and that might, for 15 minutes, help you feel more grounded and centered and ready for bed.

So, when you do these little things, you start training your brain that it's bedtime. You know, it's time for us to wind down, it's time for us to calm down, it's time for us to shut down the day. And so, it's important that we incorporate these things. But because they're small things, we disregard it and we're like, "No, I'm not doing any of that. I'm just going to wing it."

Well, winging it is not giving you any sleep. Winging it is not helping your stress levels. Winging it is leading you to places that don't feel good. We have to always be active participants in our life, whether it is big or small. You probably saw this episode at first glance and thought, "Oh, it's about sleep," was going to be something non-important.

But as we've discussed this and gone through the episode, you can see how important it is that you take tangible steps to make sure that you get good sleep. And it directly correlates with regulating our stress and anxiety and all the things.

So, create some symbolism for you. Create a nightly routine that really helps you. And then make choices throughout the day. If you're sensitive to caffeine, probably don't drink it after noon or after two o'clock. Like, figure out when your cutoff time is before caffeine keeps you up all night, if you're sensitive to it.

Now, of course, there's people that are not sensitive to caffeine. So, that would not apply to you if that was the case. But for other people, there are

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certain foods that really amp them up. And there's foods that really calm you down. Like, be really curious about the things that affect you and impact you and what sort of supports your goals of being able to get a restful night's sleep.

So, you just want to be mindful of what's going on for you because there can be a lot of root causes to why you're not sleeping really well. And so, if you're feeling triggered a lot or overwhelmed or big emotions are coming up for you, take it as information that something in your internal world needs support. And there is never shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. It's probably the best thing that you can do for yourself.

And lastly, if you liked today's episode, please feel free to rate and review it on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people find the podcast and makes this information readily available for anyone who wants it. Alright, my friends, I will see you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.

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