

Lesya Liu 0:01

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the new episode of You Can Exhale Now podcast. Today I am hosting a certified sleep expert, Martha Lewis. What sets her apart from other sleep consultants is that she tests for underlying health issues like gut health, thyroid and hormones issues, to get to the root cause of why people can sleep. She also works for high achievers who cannot go to sleep at night because of their high stress lives. So I'm very excited to talk about stress and underlying underlying health issues that people might face and how we can all get a good night's sleep. Marta, welcome to the show. Thank you for coming. So why don't you tell us more about yourself? What made you go into sleep consultants? And how do you help people to address their sleep issues?

Martha Lewis 1:49

Well, I got into sleep consulting, because of my own sleep issues a few years ago. And my insomnia started in late pregnancy, which I figured was just hormones. But even after my son was born and sleeping through the night, when he was six months old, I still wasn't sleeping. So I would go to bed early. And because I was so exhausted, and then took forever to fall asleep. And then I would wake up at three or four in the morning, and not be able to go back to sleep until six when it was time to get up. So by this point, I, I, you know, I was a mom to a young baby, I still had a full time job, and that I had actually started my own business as a pediatric sleep consultant. And yet I wasn't sleeping. So I felt like a huge fraud. Because here I am helping people sleep and I'm not sleeping. Okay. So luckily, Dana o Bowman, who I trained with for baby sleep also offered an adult sleep certification course. And so I decided to take it even though I was pretty skeptical, because after all, I already knew a lot about sleep. But it turns out that it totally helped. And I needed to make multiple changes at the same time, to some of my habits to my activity levels to what I was eating, and when I was eating them. And doing all that at once within a month, I was back to sleeping great how I used to before I had a baby and you know and got pregnant. So I was really excited to help other adults who struggled in the same way. But I always had this thought in the back of my head like what if someone has something going on health wise, that is literally keeping them from sleeping. What I've learned so far, while very important about all the foundations of sleep and looking at, you know, stress and diet and exercise and your mindset around sleep, all those things that are part of the solution for sure. But it wasn't the whole picture. So luckily, last fall, I trained with Christine Hansen from sleep like a boss to learn about testing for underlying health issues. And so now I'm really excited because I believe that for the most, for the most part unless you have a, you know, really rare sleep disorder that you are meant to sleep well, your bodies, your minds need to sleep. And so if you aren't sleeping, there is a reason why and we can figure it out. So that's how I help people. Now I have, you know, two different programs, one that looks at those foundations that I talked about, and then another that adds that lab testing. So I'm looking at things like gut health, if you have some kind of gut infection, that's going to cause inflammation which can cause you to wake up at night, if you're sensitive to certain foods that again, cause inflammation if your hormones are out of balance if your thyroid isn't functioning optimally. And then I also look at your mineral status. Hair tissue mineral analysis. So by looking at all those together, I'm, you

know, I, I like to call myself a sleep detective because I'm using all those pieces to figure out what's going on, so that we can get to sleeping great again.

Lesya Liu 5:18

Great. And, you know, sleep became this very mainstream topic, it got the street cred in the media. And we all know about the importance of sleep for both our physical health and our mental health. And yet, like you said, a lot of people are struggling to get a good night's sleep to get enough of it, to make sure that it is really restful and really deep restorative sleep. So how do you help these people? And what are the most common? Without even going to the lab? Like, is there anything that you see right away? These people, and you know, what, what their issues are? That you can say, Aha, I know exactly what's going on here.

Martha Lewis 6:15

Yes, well, you know, quite a few of the people I work with have trouble falling asleep, everyone I work with has trouble staying asleep. So they're waking up, again, it's that three, usually three or 4am time, and not able to go back to sleep. So that's a very common problem I see. And to me, that actually indicates that there's something going on in your body. So the falling asleep tends to be more psychological, you know, that kind of stress. And staying asleep tends to be more physiological. So what's going on in your body. And I also, you know, a lot of people I work with have been struggling for a long time, decades even. And so they already know a ton about sleep, and, you know, and the basics behind it and what we should be doing, right, like, I think at this point, if you've looked at anything about sleep, you know that you don't want to be watching screens before bed, you know, that you don't want to be eating a big meal before bed, you know that you should be managing your stress. So a lot of the people I work with are already doing all these things, and it still isn't helping. So, you know, that again, is another indicator that something else is going on. And most people once I do the testing, they do have some kind of gut infection. So whether that is parasites or bacterial overgrowth, or fungal overgrowth, there's usually something going on there. And, and usually leaky gut as well, which means that, you know, the cells of your gut wall aren't as rigid or aren't as close together as they should be. And so they're letting undigested food particles and toxins and things get through the gut wall into your bloodstream and causing inflammation. So those are very common problems I see.

Lesya Liu 8:08

And that's and lack of sleep usually makes those issues worse, I know that for sure. Sleep has a huge effect on our hormone production. So it seems like if you don't have a good sleep, because of your hormones, you almost get into this vicious cycle downward cycle. So how do you help people to put a stop and the cycle and improve both the sleep and the hormone production?

Martha Lewis 8:38

Yeah, definitely, well, you know, some hormone imbalances, actually, from gut issues. So to me, it all starts with the gut. And fixing that can definitely help balance the hormones. If things are totally out of whack, then I do recommend supplements. And same with you know, with the gut and healing the gut, what I'm recommending are supplements and some kind of coming from a functional medicine type slant to everything where we're doing these tests, recommended supplements for a short term, to get everything back in balance. And then that helps get you sleeping better, which is going to keep everything in balance. So you're right is totally a chicken and an egg situation where it does tend to be this vicious cycle with all of these things in our health, and then not sleeping, which only makes it worse.

Lesya Liu 9:31

Absolutely. And so we've talked about the reasons why people wake up at night, but you've also mentioned that a lot of people are struggling to fall asleep because of psychological issues. Can you talk a little bit about what those are and how can we address those issues and finally, fall asleep easily?

Martha Lewis 9:55

Well, so you know, I think so many of our sleep problems these days. have so much to do with our modern lifestyle, right? Like we're waking up to an alarm clock in the morning, we're rushing out the door, we're go, go go all day long. And then coming home dealing with dinner, possibly dealing with kids, all these and possibly more work. And then all of a sudden, you know, it's you're exhausted, it's time to go to bed, but you haven't given your body any time during the day to relax. And so when that happens, and your cortisol levels are super high all day long, then it's hard for them to lower at night when it should. So I can talk a little bit about cortisol. First of all, that's one of our stress hormones. And so it kind of has a bad rap. But it's a very necessary hormone that actually wakes us up in the morning and keeps us alert throughout the day. And then it's also released when we have a stress response. So say, I live in the mountains. So I always like to talk about, say, I'm hiking in the mountains, and a bear starts chasing me, my body is going to release cortisol, adrenaline, epinephrine, and all these hormones that are literally going to help me run from or fight that bear. Now our body doesn't know the difference between running from a bear and being frustrated, because you're stuck in traffic, or because you're running late for work or because you got in a fight with your spouse or because you feel overwhelmed all the time with all that you have to do. So even though your body doesn't need to run from or fight something, it's still releasing those hormones, it's still having that same response. And like I said, having that all day is then going to lead to high cortisol levels at night. And our cortisol should pretty much be zero at bedtime, and throughout the night until he gets later in the morning. So all of that stress is what's going to make it hard to fall asleep. And then that, you know, that contributes to staying asleep as well. And so I kind of like to talk about it, like say it's a bucket of water. But imagine it's a bucket of stress. So you know, we have stressors all the time, we're going to have some emotional stress all the time, you're going to have some physical stress all the time. So you do have low grade inflammation from being sensitive to certain foods. But then if you start adding stress to it, so if you're constantly

psychologically stressed, or if your body's getting more and more unhealthy, and that's causing physical stress, then at some point, that book is going to overflow, because there's just too much there's too much cortisol, there's too much stress all the time. And so, you know, that's why even though I'm looking at underlying health issues, I'm also addressing stress, because we need to lower all kinds of stress to get that bucket, say to hafele so that your body can sleep at night and function optimally.

Lesya Liu 13:02

And what are some of the strategies you recommend to your clients to unwind at night before going to sleep?

Martha Lewis 13:11

Yeah, well, you know, that's just part of it. But it is a big part of it, I do recommend having what I call a power down hour. So that is the hour before bedtime, where you're not looking at screens. So ideally, you're not watching TV, you're not scrolling through your phone, you're definitely not working on your computer. And you're instead you're doing relaxing things. So that could look like journaling, meditating, taking a bath, reading, listening to audiobooks, stretching, you know, like all of these very relaxing things that are going to help you wind down, lower your stress, lower those cortisol levels, so that you can then set yourself up for sleep and ease into sleep.

Lesya Liu 13:55

And you know, you've mentioned a lot about screens and computers. Can you speak a little bit about how technology affects modern sleep and all of the different ways that it affects the sleep quality and the amount of sleep you're getting?

Martha Lewis 14:15

Yeah, definitely. Well, it's funny, because it's really a very recent history that we've even had the light bulb like that was invented only 200 years ago. So, so much has changed in 200 years. And then in the past few decades with all these screens, you know, it totally coincides with the increase in sleep problems. So a lot of that comes from the fact that these screens emit blue light, which is what's also what the sun emits during the day, and it tells our bodies that it's daytime. But if you are watching screens in the evening, then your body still thinks it is day time and it's still going to be, you know, producing cortisol, it's still going to And that's going to suppress melatonin, which is the hormone that helps us sleep. So. So yeah, that's why screens have become such a problem because they enable us to, you know, work, be in touch with everything any hour of the day and night. And then screens also make us wired but tired. So, you know, blue light blocking glasses can help. And that's something I recommend, if someone's, you know, resistant to do a whole hour before bed, have no screens, then Okay, maybe 30 minutes before bed, no screens and say you want to watch a TV show the 30 minutes before that. wearing blue light blocking glasses can help for sure. Because, again, because those screens inhibit our melatonin production. We still might produce enough melatonin to fall asleep at night, but it won't be enough to last us through the night to stay

asleep. So it's kind of amazing. You know that? Because people don't make that connection, right? Like, oh, I'm watching screens before bed? What does that have to do with three or 4am? Well, it's because your body didn't produce enough melatonin to keep you asleep. So that's why screens are such a big deal and affect our sleep so much.

Lesya Liu 16:19

Mm hmm. And we'll just say that, you know, turning off screens an hour before sleep is enough? Or would you recommend even more for someone who is struggling to fall asleep or stay asleep.

Martha Lewis 16:33

I always like to start there. With an hour, it can't hurt to wear blue light blocking glasses starting two hours before bed. And or at least dim your lights again, like, you know, tell your brain that it's getting to be evening time. So it starts preparing for sleep.

Lesya Liu 16:51

I see. So I know that you've also got ms in holistic nutrition. And so I want to steer our conversation in that direction and talk to you about what we eat during the day and how it affects our sleep. I think by now everyone knows that caffeine. It has very negative effects on our sleep. But I think for a majority of people, that's where their knowledge kind of stops. So can you talk a little bit about what to eat and not and what not to eat if you're struggling to sleep?

Martha Lewis 17:30

Yeah, definitely. I love that question. Because I do think that what you eat during the day totally determines how you're going to sleep at night. And the first thing to keep in mind is that you want to keep your blood sugar levels really steady throughout the day. So if you are on what's called a blood sugar rollercoaster, where and you know, your blood sugar is spiked when you eat things like especially refined carbohydrates, refined sugar, fruit juices, you know, pastries, pastas, all those kinds of things. If you eat those by themselves, then they're going to totally spike your blood sugar, and then your body is going to release insulin to correct that. And then your blood sugar is going to drop really low. And then you're going to have those cravings for those sweet foods because your body wants that quick energy. And then if you eat them again, then you're spiking your blood sugar again. And so you're on this up and down roller coaster all day. And if you're on that all day, you're also going to be on that roller coaster in the night. And when your blood sugar levels dropped too low in the night. Guess what your body releases cortisol because it's stressed and it's running out of energy. And so then you're awake. And once your body releases cortisol at night, it's hard to go back to sleep, it's going to take an hour or two to be able to go back to sleep. So that's the first thing I always like to emphasize is keeping those blood sugar levels steady. So starting breakfast, making sure to have some protein. Carbohydrates are still you know, great to have for breakfast as well. But having that protein, having some healthy fat to minimize a blood sugar spike is really important. So you don't want to start your day with a bagel and a coffee or a doughnut and a coffee for example.

That's just gonna set you up for poor sleep the next night. Yeah, and, and so then throughout the day, you know, keeping those blood sugar levels steady, and making sure that you have protein and fat with every meal with every snack that's going to help with that. And another thing that I think people don't realize is that we actually do need carbohydrates, especially in the evening or for dinner, that's going to help your body produce insulin, which actually helps it make serotonin and melatonin. So, you know, I've seen people on really low carb diets or if they're not having any carbs at night, their sleep can be disrupted. And that's because your body actually needs some carbohydrates to make those important hormones for sleep. Now, you still want to have some protein, you still want to have some fat, but having complex carbohydrates with that as key. And so for the same reasons of blood sugar, you don't want to have a super sweet snack before bed either. So, you know, that kind of eliminates ice cream as that after dinner snack, because again, that's just going to spike your blood sugar, then they're going to drop, and then you're going to wake up for so hours later and have a hard time going back to sleep.

Lesya Liu 20:38

Mm hmm. And I know that all of these strategies, you know what to do, right before you go to sleep, or how to make your bedroom more sleep friendly, and to take out technology out of your bedroom. It all has this name of like sleep hygiene. And we hear a lot about sleep hygiene. And there are lots of different tips and tricks and directions, to the point where sometimes it gets even exhausting. But like a little bit about what sleep hygiene is, and what does it mean, and how do we ensure that we have the best sleep hygiene possible?

Martha Lewis 21:16

Yeah, I mean, part of the sleep hygiene is, you know, staying away from those screens before bed, it's taking time to wind down. So all those things are part of it. It's also what your what's your bedroom is like you pretty much want your bedroom to be a sleep sanctuary. And you ideally want it to be for sleep only. So you know, you want your brain to have this association that bed and bedroom equal sleep. So it's really why you don't want to work in bed, watch TV, in bed, even read in bed, so that your brain keeps a strong association. It's also important for your room to be cool. You know, 62 to 67 degrees is a recommended temperature range. So that's key, having a dark is very important. Again, any kind of light coming in can suppress melatonin and make it hard to stay asleep. So having blackout blinds, blackout curtains, something that keeps, you know, external light out is key, or wearing a sleep mask, which is what I do right now, because it's starting to get light at five something in the morning. And so, you know, I don't want that light to keep me awake or to wake me up at that time. So yeah, having a dark is key, you definitely want it to be comfortable, of course. So having a good mattress, having comfy sheets, comfy pajamas, you know, all of those are important how your room smells like you can use certain essential oils and scents like lavender and KML to help literally wind down and relax and lower your cortisol. And you want it to be visually appealing as well and clutter free. So your brain is going to be able to relax a lot more if it's walking into this, you know, this nice looking place that doesn't have all this clutter that reminds you have everything you need to do and all

that. So that's also important. And the last thing that's kind of debatable, but something I believe in is, is not having EMF, or electromagnetic frequencies in your room. So that means, you know, turning your phone on airplane mode, even turning off the Wi Fi in the house, if you can, not having your computer in your room. You know, I've worked with some people who are very sensitive to those emfs and or that magnetic, you know, fields that are happening from all of our wireless devices. And so I really recommend shutting down those things for the night. And then you're actually less tempted if you wake up in the night to look at them anyway. So. So yeah, that's what sleep hygiene looks like.

Lesya Liu 24:10

And are there any tips or directions about what we need to do when we wake up? Because I know we've talked a lot about what to do right before you go to sleep and during the day. But are there any directions or any positive ways we can impact our sleep? Is what we do as the first thing in the morning when we have a cup?

Martha Lewis 24:35

Yeah, definitely. So I actually strongly believe in having a relaxing morning routine as well. So even though it's so far away from the next night, again, starting your day off at low stress is going to help keep those stress levels low throughout the day. So you know having a routine where like you know I have a four year old son I like to wake up 30 minutes Before he does, and then have this time to myself or I can meditate, I can write down what I'm grateful for. I can, you know, visualize my goals and how I want the day to go. Or I can just read if I want. But taking some time to myself to start the day instead of just starting, hitting the ground running is definitely helpful to help manage your cortisol levels during the day so that you can actually sleep better at night.

Lesya Liu 25:30

Mm hmm. And, you know, there's a lot of contradicting advice around naps, whether you should be taking naps, whether they mess up their sleep at night. So what do you say? And what do you recommend to your clients? Regarding naps?

Martha Lewis 25:49

Yeah, well, I am actually a big fan of naps. Now, the timing matters, how long it matters. But most of my clients, especially when we're first starting and they are sleep deprived, a nap is going to benefit them, it's going to help reduce what we call that sleep debt. So that means that, you know, over time, if we constantly are sleeping enough, our body accumulates that debt, it doesn't just go away and start over every night. So yeah, taking a nap can definitely reduce that sleep debt. And, you know, studies are showing that naps make you more productive and focused and able to concentrate, and even remember things better when you wake up. So, you know, I think that that's why so many cultures do take a nap because we have this natural dip in our circadian rhythm in that early afternoon time, usually about eight hours after we wake up. And so that's when most people you know, feel that lol after lunch and want to grab caffeine or

sweets, or whatever, because again, your body wants that quick energy. But what your body could use most is an app. So you know, timing it for that early afternoon, or about eight hours after you wake up is, is the best time for most people to be able to nap. And I see it too. I tell my clients, even if they aren't falling asleep, just taking that break and resting, resting their brain can really help them feel a lot better. So it doesn't even matter if you're falling asleep. A lot of times I don't even think I'm falling asleep when I take a nap. And then I wake up with a little drool on my pillow. And I'm like, Oh, yeah, okay, I guess I did fall asleep. You know, but, but, again, limiting it to 30 minutes means that you're only going to fall into stage one and stage two sleep, you're not going to fall into those deeper stages of sleep. And so it's easier to wake up being refreshed and alert, if you're, if you're limiting it to that 30 minutes. For people who are severely sleep deprived, you know, it can help to take a longer nap during the day. But I suggest not setting an alarm like you know, if they, their bodies naturally are going to fall asleep and sleep for an hour and a half, then they should give it that time. Because if you set an alarm clock for 45 minutes, and are sleep cycles are 90 minutes, that means your alarm clock is going off in the middle of that sleep cycle. And that's when you feel really groggy and disoriented and out of it for the rest of the day. So it's either take a power nap or give yourself time to take a full restorative nap and not wake up to an alarm clock.

Lesya Liu 28:39

Mm hmm. And you've mentioned a thing called circadian rhythms. Can you tell our listeners what that is? And how to figure out your own circadian rhythm? Or do we all have the same circadian rhythms? It's just messed up in one case.

Martha Lewis 29:06

Yes, so it is true. Our circadian rhythm is our body clock. And that's when our body prefers to wake up and go to sleep at night. And there are night owls and early birds and hummingbirds are the people in between, which is the majority of the population at least 50% and so that's why our society is based on that schedule. But there are people whose rhythm is later and whose rhythm is earlier and it's genetic and there's not much you can do about it. So you know it's not that the night owl has a hard time waking up in the morning is lazy or unproductive or anything that's literally just their rhythm. So, you know as far as figuring out their rhythm, that's something I do help my clients do. And you know, it kind of is determined by as I mean throughout our life, our rhythm changes like kids tend to be more early birds. And then as you get into the teenage years, teenagers are night owls, their circadian rhythm is delayed by a few hours. And so they're, you know, that is a good reason why they don't want to go to bed early and why they want to sleep all the time. That's literally their body clock. And then once you hit your mid 20s, is when, you know, you can kind of get into your own rhythm. And so a lot of times I ask people, you know, sometimes people trying to go to bed too early or going to bed too late. And so kind of figuring out when you slept well, what was your, what was your rhythm? Then what time? Were you going to bed? What time were you waking up? Okay, let's start there. And, and go with that and see if that helps. So a lot of times, I am gradually helping people move their

bedtime later or move it earlier. And you know, but it's all a little bit of an experiment as well to see what works and what's going to be ideal.

Lesya Liu 30:56

So basically, the best rule of thumb is to listen to your body.

Martha Lewis 31:00

Yes, exactly.

Lesya Liu 31:05

And so I wanted to ask you one more thing. And that is more about, you know, with everything that's going on around the world right now is COVID-19. And a lot of fear and fear in the media, and some of the very real things that are happening because of COVID-19. I know that sleep is very important for your immune system, but also for you know, your stress resilience and how the two are connected. So could you speak a little bit about the importance of sleep right now during these uncertain times? And how can we ensure that our immune system is up and running and protecting us? And what role does stress resilience play into all of this?

Martha Lewis 31:54

Yeah, definitely. I mean, you're right, sleep is very important from unity. You know, again, lots of studies have been done about this, but they've injected people with a common cold and compare those who, you know, we're sleeping seven to nine hours a night, which is a recommended range, or sleeping less than that. And I don't remember the exact numbers, but you know, a lot larger percentage of people who weren't sleeping, that at least seven hours a night got the cold, whereas people who were sleeping, didn't get it as much. So again, like, there's more and more evidence about how important sleep is for our immune system. So getting enough sleep is especially key, you know, during this time, to either if you've been exposed from it to decrease your chances of actually, you know, getting super sick, or even, to lessen the symptoms that you do have all that's going to be influenced by how while you're sleeping. And that's why when you do get sick, all your body wants to do is sleep, right? Like it wants to recover, and, and put all of his energy into recovery and not into anything else. So yeah, sleep is very important for immunity. And, you know, as far as sleep and stress goes, again, it's, you know, it can be the vicious cycle, because yes, getting more sleep does make you more resilient to stress. But, you know, then being stressed is going to affect your sleep as well. So it's definitely a tricky, vicious cycle there. But, you know, I think making sure to prioritize your sleep if you're one of those, you know, lucky people who have no problem sleeping, making it a priority is especially important right now. And if you're one of those people who can't sleep, then figuring that out, is especially important right now, for sure.

Mm hmm. Great. Martha, thank you so much for all your tips and tricks and knowledge as it pertains to sleep. And I'm sure a lot of people got a lot of very good ideas to try out tonight. Again, thank you so much for coming onto the show. And for anyone who is interested to learn

more about Martha's work. We will have all of the details in the Episode Notes section below. But you can also reach her at the complete sleep solution that comm Martha again, thank you so much for this conversation and for giving us so many great tips.

Martha Lewis

Thank you!

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>