

Health

Sleeping is the new measure of success

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Penelope Green, The New York Times



At the MIT Media Lab, the futuristic digital experimentation center, David Rose is researching about bedtime stories, bedding and hammocks, as well as lavender oil and blankets. Rose (a researcher and inventor-entrepreneur) and her co-workers have tested using weight-bearing sheets that induce the feeling of being wrapped while listening to recordings of Icelandic fairy tales in order to recreate an ideal sleeping environment that can culminate in Making a napkin capsule or, as he put it, "a new type of furniture".

Meanwhile, at the University of California at Berkeley, Matthew P. Walker, a professor of Neuroscience and Psychology and director of the University's Sleep and Neurological Imaging Laboratory, is working on direct current stimulation as a cure for sleep deprivation in mature brains. Walker is also scrutinizing the millions of hours of human sleep data he has received from Sense, a lovely, delicate sphere that measures air quality and other intangibles in your room, and then suggests changes to help you sleep better.

"I have a mission," he said. "I want to reunite humanity with the dream of which it has been deprived." Sense is the first product made by Hello Inc., a technology company founded by British entrepreneur James Proud, in which Walker is the scientific director.

In Paris, Hugo Mercier, an engineer in Computer Science, has invested in sound waves. He has collected more than ten million dollars to create a headband that he uses to induce sleep. Beta testing of the product, called Dreem, has been conducted on 500 people (out of a group of 6500 applicants, Mercier said) and will be ready for sale this summer.

Just then, Ben Olsen, an Australian businessman, hopes to present Thim, a device that is used on a finger and that emits a sound to wake you every three minutes for an hour, just before going to sleep. It seems that interrupting sleep can cure interrupted sleep (and Olsen, like all good dream entrepreneurs, has the research to prove it). It is his second device for sleep; The first was the Re-Timer which consists of a pair of glasses to reconfigure your body clock. Since 2012, it has sold 30,000 pairs in 40 countries, he said.

For years, study after study has shown how poor sleep weakens the immune system, causes learning and memory deficits, contributes to depression and other mood and mental disorders, as well as obesity, diabetes, cancer and premature death (Sleep through sedation has been shown to be as harmful as poor sleep).

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) views sleep deprivation as a public health problem. Sleeping well helps with brain plasticity, as studies in mice have shown; Sleeping badly will make you fat, it will make you sad and then it will kill you. It is also expensive: Last year, the RAND Corporation published a study that estimated that the commercial loss due to poor sleep in the United States is \$ 411 billion: a loss in gross domestic product of 2.28 percent.

If sleeping was the new sex - as Marian Salzman, an executive at Havas PR North America proclaimed ten years ago, today is a measure of success, a skill that must be nurtured and fed.

"Sleep is the most effective thing you can do to reconfigure your brain and your body," Walker said. "We have a saying in medicine: what can be measured, can be handled."

Dream entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley and elsewhere have been interested in the "dream space" - a market worth \$ 32 billion in 2012 - previously in the hands of traditional mattress manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies.

Previously, the paradigm of success centered on the story of one who slept little: corporate titans and world leaders - such as Martha Stewart and the last two US presidents - talked about their little time off as proof of what they were able. It turns out that short-term sleepers, as they are known, may have a genetic mutation, Arianna Huffington noted in her book published in 2016: *The Dream Revolution: Transform Your Life Night after Night*.

The US military has proclaimed that sleep is a pillar of optimum performance for soldiers. Jeff Bezos, chief executive of Amazon, who used to carry a sleeping bag to work when he was a modest computer programmer, has said that his eight-hour sleep every night was good for his investors. Huffington's new company, Thrive Global, is working with Accenture, JP Morgan Chase and Uber, among other companies, on an anti-exhaustion schedule that educates employees on the importance of sleep. Aetna, the health care company, is paying its workers up to \$ 500 a year if they can prove that they slept for seven hours for 20 consecutive days.

In 2015, actor Jeff Bridges recorded a spoken disc, *Dreaming With Jeff*, a project for Squarespace, which reached number two on the Billboard charts in the New Age category.

Dreaming with Jeff made me anxious, just like *Sleep With Me*, a podcast by Drew Ackerman, a San Francisco serious voice librarian, whose "boring sleeping stories" are designed to cure insomnia and are downloaded 1.3 million times Per month, as *The New Yorker* reported last year. I prefer the thousands of "songs" on Spotify's sleep charts, particularly if they sound like "falling water" or "office air conditioning", and I have a static noise machine. However, recently, in my desperation, I sought a more radical intervention, perhaps a cure for the restlessness at three in the morning that has haunted me for years.

The \$ 85 Ghost Pillow has a "patent-pending temperature sensitivity technology" designed to keep your head cool. It is very comfortable, but when I read what this pillow is made of, polyurethane foam rubber, I was dreaming. I bought a \$ 28 Good Night Light LED bulb, which comes with its own "patented technology" to help your own production of melatonin.

I can not say if that was what happened, but since the focus creates too much gloom for my mature eyes, it was hard for me to read my help to fall asleep, an old copy of Nancy Mitford's *Love Hunt*, and I Made me fall asleep half an hour earlier than usual. However, I woke up at three in the morning, as my Sense sphere warned me the following day, through an application on my phone. I also woke up at five in the morning, when the cat tossed the dial from the night table and glowed red in protest. "There was a noise," the application explained.

My dream summary, provided by Sense, was attractive but discouraging. Why is the quality of my air "not ideal"? How comfortable do I feel about sharing my sleeping habits with a new Silicon Valley company?

Nancy Rothstein, known as the Dream Ambassador, taught me her recipe for relaxation, a practice that mixes gratitude with body awareness and breathing. Start with the toes of your feet, he said, and thank the parts of your body for their work (my favorite is: "Knees, I know it is not always easy for you).

Still, the best dream I had in weeks cost \$ 22 and lasted 33 minutes. It was a "class" of Deep Rest at Inscape, a meditation studio in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, designed by Winka Dubbeldam, the quoted Dutch architect, to evoke the Burning Man temple and other esoteric spaces.

Keledjian, who meditates, seeks to make practice a "luxury with all conscience," he said. Although there are human "facilitators" in all classes - who gently touch the feet of the snorting attendants if they make it very loud - the practice is guided by a recording of an Australian girl, whom they called Skye.

It was lunch time on a rainy Tuesday, I placed myself on a soft rug with a headboard, a pillow and a cozy blanket. Skye invited me to stay awake, then uttered a script like Rothstein's, in mellifluous tones. I fell asleep once or twice, and by the deaf snorting of the other attendants, so did they. That night, I slept until dawn.

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