I had to say goodbye to my Freudian subconsciousness in the last BrainCandy. Something, where we are personally so sure, that „something“ inside us operates independently.

I now had to recognize that something similar applies to sleep, and that we cannot analyse this true importance ourselves. Of course, we do recognize, when we are tired, and have not slept enough, and we plan on compensating that during the weekend. And by the way: that does not work¹.

But I completely underestimated the immense impact that sleep has on our quality of life. The current book by the renowned sleep² researcher Prof. Matthew Walker: `Why we sleep`, had me astonished. I will sum up these findings briefly in this BrainCandy. I will not cite proof, just insight. And that is exciting enough.

Let’s start: two thirds of all adults in industrialised countries do not sleep the recommended 8 hours. I knew before that sleep is important, but I thought exercising and a healthy diet would be more important. That is false. Sleep beats all of it. Just one night with sleep deprivation has more serious consequences for the physical and mental health, than not eating well enough or not exercising enough for one day.

The effects of sleep deprivation:

1. Who consistently sleeps less than 6-7 hours a night, damages his immune system and doubles his risk to get cancer.

2. How long you sleep has an impact on your risk of getting Alzheimer’s.

3. Not sleeping enough, even if it is just for a week, affects the blood sugar level on a pre-diabetic standard.

4. Sleep deprivation increases the appetite, because the appetite-suppressing hormone is getting itself suppressed.

5. „I can sleep, when I am dead“. True. You will be - a lot faster. Who thinks 5 hours of sleep are enough, will get Alzheimer’s earlier, just ask Ronal Reagan and Maggie Thatcher. Both advocates for only 4 to 5 hours of sleep a night. There are no exceptions. You better warn your boss.

6. Almost all mental disorders will at least get worse, if not even caused because of sleep deprivation.

7. More than 20% of all accidents in Germany are caused because of sleep deprivation, that is more than are caused because of alcohol and drugs all together! When someone falls asleep behind the wheel for just a second, the car turns into an erratic torpedo! Driving under the influence would still allow for delayed reactions. The yearly switch to my beloved daylight saving time has a similar effect on us, that takes us a whole week to get used to.

You don’t play with sleep, no, not even the manager!
Why we cannot perceive ourselves the huge health benefit that sleep gives us.
What is sleep good for?

- Sleep is a lot more complex and interesting than we think.

- Sleep satisfies a purpose for the brain and for the body.

- Sleep supports our ability to learn new things and to make logical decisions.

- Sleep helps our mental health, because it calibrates our emotional circuits.

- Dreaming gives us a calming neurochemical bath, that soothes painful memories, as well as a virtual reality, where the brain can merge past with present, which supports creativity in us.

- Sleep strengthens our immune system, so that we can fight infects, diseases and tumours. The microbiome in our bowel gets stronger (which has is on it’s own trendy). Good sleep decreases blood pressure and ensures a healthy heart.

- After thousands of research studies we do not have to ask anymore, why sleep is good, but if there are any biological functions, that sleep does not help to improve?

What prevents good sleep?

- When it starts getting dark outside, our bodies produce the sleeping hormone melatonin. Supposedly. Because today artificial lights replace the darkness in cities and in apartments. Especially the blue light, that gets produced by LED lights and monitors signals bright morning light and prevents the melatonin formation.

- Caffeine has a half-life of around 7 hours. The espresso after dinner gets back at you in the middle of the night, when your sleep pressure is lower and the caffeine now stronger. A lot of people metabolise caffeine even slower and should not drink any more of the delicious brew after 2 pm.

- Sleeping pills! Those do not bring any real sleep, they just numb the prefrontal cortex and stop most of the neuronal, health beneficial processes. A stopgap – for a better snooze, that is dangerous for your health.

- Unadapted sleeping behaviours with chronotypes: around 40% are larks like me, they get up at dawn and are ready for work. Around 30% are owls. They cannot fall asleep before dawn and are not suited to work in the AM. Owls are more likely to be depressed, to have anxiety, diabetes, cancer, heart attacks and strokes. The other 30% are somewhere in between. Employees at Google are allowed to work according to their chronotype. Puberty turns all teenagers into owls. Therefore the early start of school every morning is a catastrophe for adolescents.
- Using smartphones before bedtime. Especially teenagers are endangered. The social pressure even at night decreases the sleep quality.

What are the most important rules for good sleep?

1. Go daily (!) to bed at the same time and get up again after eight hours. Yes, even on the weekend.

2. Sleep in a completely dark room. Use blackout curtains.

3. No TV in the bedroom. Smartphones only in airplane mode.

4. In case you have to look at monitors at night, you should decrease the blue lights of them through software (like F.lux for PC/Android) and on your iPhone you can just switch to night mode. In the best case scenario, you just wear BlueBlocker Glasses (Amazon) two hours before going to bed. No, they do not look cool, maybe nerdy, but they are helpful.

5. For biohackers: the current best sleep tracker is the Oura Ring, that can track many things, like sleeping cycles, heart beat and variability, activities and more. The ring is perfect to find out through experimenting, what influences your sleep and how you can get more deep sleep. The ring costs around € 320,- (including shipping to Germany). I do not have any affiliation with this company, but I do have a code that gives you 60,-€ off. I am not sure how much longer the code will work, but if you are interested, just send me an E-Mail.

In case you do not feel like reading right now, just start with listening to this podcast⁴. The innovative physician, Peter Atta, is interviewing Prod. Walker. Very entertaining and to be honest: sometimes quite nerdy.

Sources:
2. https://www.amazon.de/Das-gro%C3%9Fe-Buch-vom-Schlaf/dp/344217791X/ref=sr_1_fkmrnull_1?__mk_de_DE=%C3%85M%C3%95%C3%91&crid=PIE6WX6K67F&keywords=mattew+walker+das+gro%C3%9Fe+buch+vom+schlaf&qid=1557909862&s=gateway&spr-e-fix=mattew+walker%2Caps%2C236&sr=8-1-fkmrnull
**Book recommendation:**

By Ralph Ohnemus:

**Markenerleben.** Die Strategie im Hyperwettbewerb und Informationstsunami  [hier bestellen](#)

**Markenstaunen.** Gewinnen im Informationstsunami  [hier bestellen](#)

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