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Context to the nugget

Matthew shares his perspectives on the thing that a lot of us grapple with. The situation when we are trying to fall asleep but are not able to sleep. The more we try, the harder it gets. Then it gets into a vicious loop leading to significant frustration and anxiety. He also speaks about the brain being an associative device and suggests actions to ensure that the brain doesn't associate lying in bed with staying awake.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And just maybe last question as we wrap up, a very, very micro and a tactical question, but for people that... you know, I've had these situations as well where you are in bed, you are tossing around and you know you need to sleep but you are not getting sleep and you wonder if you should just wake up and do something else given that you are awake anyway. Couple of questions here. One is any tactical things people can do to drift into sleep and second is, is there something around get up, do something else and come back and sleep when you are sort of tossing around without adequate sleep.

Matthew Walker (MW): So, I think three things here that are relevant. Firstly, try not to get too anxious. Now after this podcast and hearing all of the marked deleterious health consequences that come from lack of sleep that's easier said than done but I think one of the problems with my message and my communication with the public is that people can sometimes get even more anxious and can make their sleep worse and I'd really like to try and suggest that people not do that. Try not to have a retrospective view what is gone has gone and let's sort of be more prospective and think about what can we do even if you've had a bad night of sleep last night. What can we do tomorrow night to make that sleep better and implement behavioural change for the long-term, that's the first point? But more acutely in that moment it to come back to your question the first thing that people can try is actually meditation? It's one of the things that has been researched and seems to have a really quite beneficial effect on people struggling with insomnia. And part of the reason is because when you are awake and you are starting to become anxious the fight or flight branch of your nervous system kicks into high gear and the brain as a consequence starts to ruminate or catastrophize and you have that rolodex of anxiety and then downstairs in the body you release stress chemicals such as adrenaline and your heart starts to race and it's very difficult for you to fall asleep in that physiological state. But meditation helps essentially take your mind off itself. So, you stop ruminating and worrying and it also helps with resting the nervous system and taking you out of that fight or flight state and then you can start to fall asleep more easily, that's the second suggestion. The third however is that if you've been awake and none of this is working and you've been awake for maybe 20 or 25 minutes the advice is don't stay in bed, actually get up and go and do something else and only return to bed when you are sleepy and there's no time limit. And the

reason is the following: your brain is an incredibly associative device and if you lie in bed awake your brain starts to learn over time that this thing called your bed is about being awake not about being asleep and you need to break that association and you should only return to bed as I said when sleepy and that way your brain will gradually over time relearn the association that your bed is this place of sound and secure sleep. And so, the analogy here would be you would never sit at the dinner table waiting to get hungry. So why would you lie in bed waiting to get sleepy and the answer is you shouldn't, you should get out after a certain time period and just go back when you are sleepy.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. If you are finding this conversation purposeful, you might also like to tune into my conversation with Matt Dixon a Triathlon coach in Silicon Valley, who specifically speaks about the role of rest and recovery when you train for triathlons.

If you are deriving value from the podcast, please consider paying it forward to Antarang Foundation, an organization I work with closely. Antarang Foundation is a not for profit that works with 1000s of young adults and helps them play to their potential. While the world of human potential, I believe, is uniformly distributed, the world of opportunity is unfortunately unevenly distributed. We may not realize it or want to acknowledge it, but the reality is that a lot of us are beneficiaries of the ovarian lottery that sets us up very differently. To know more about how you can make a difference, do visit the Pay it forward section at PlaytoPotential.com.

End of nugget transcription

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Matthew Walker - Nuggets

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- 55.05 Matthew Walker - REM and Non-REM sleep and criticality of each
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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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