March Newsletter – The 90 Minute Rule

Trawling though Dubai airport recently at some ungodly hour of the morning and in a state of half stupor, I wandered into a bookstore to while away some time, when lo and behold, sitting on a shelf in the non-fiction best seller category was a brightly covered book that shone like a beacon and put a smile on my dial.

In that very moment, a copy of the same book, which had been recommended by a good friend, was in my suitcase, wending its way towards the cargo hold of an aircraft for the onward leg of my journey.

Given that I was going 'back to the future' through 8 time zones and would be predisposed to all kinds of circadian rhythms and blues, I figured that it was the perfect accompaniment to help me better manage jetlag and to expand my ever increasing knowledge on the subject of sleep.

Night School – Wake up to the Power of Sleep, by Richard Wiseman is packed full of easy-to-read, popular psychology goodies that will help you if you are struggling to get enough zzzzzzz's or to understand the importance of sleep.

'So, what's the 90-minute rule?' I hear you say.

Well, as you are probably aware, our body is biologically programmed to run in a 24-hour sleep-wake cycle (circadian rhythm). What you may not be aware of however is the fact that within this rhythm lies a second rhythm (ultradian rhythm), which comprises sixteen 90-minute cycles that peak and trough as we move, groove and snooze throughout the day and night.

The trick is to ride these waves and to come to shore (wake up) at the end of a 90-minute cycle.

'Why so?' Well, in the process of sleep, we dip down through 4 progressively deeper stages and then rise back up again through the lighter stages and into the realm of dreaming, following which there is often a micro-awakening (of which we're unaware).

Given that the average person needs between 7 and 9 hours of sleep to feel well rested and refreshed, these 90-minute sleep cycles usually happen 5-6 times throughout the night.

So, to wake up feeling tickly boo and full of the joys, set your alarm to go off at the end of a 90-minute cycle.

In other words, count backwards from the time you wish to wake up in 90-minute chunks to work out the best time to go to bed.

Assuming you wish to wake up at 6.00am (having had a good 7.5 hours sleep), do the math:

6.00am -> 4.30am -> 3.00am -> 1.30am -> 12.00am -> **10.30pm**

As such, hit the sack before 10.15pm (to allow up to 15 minutes to fall asleep) and the rest is history.

Meanwhile, back in Dubai, buckled up on a runway waiting to take off, I opened The Times newspaper and was faced with the headline *'Modern Life' causes Sleep Disorder Surge.* I felt another smile coming on…

Till next month, here's to riding the waves and to maxing out your new-found, 90-minute knowledge!

Caroline