



## 5 Reasons Why Your Mental Health Depends on Refreshing Sleep

*Whether you're battling full-on anxiety and depression, or feel like you're starting to languish, you may want to prioritize refreshing sleep. Here are 5 reasons why.*

A few weeks ago, I was hit with several professional and personal challenges. The first was merely disappointing; at the third, I could feel my mental health being put to the test. Fortunately, [my inner voice](#) said, "get some sleep."

### 1. Sleep keeps your prefrontal cortex in charge.

The [prefrontal cortex](#) sits at the front of your brain. It's best known for its executive functions, including "controlling short-sighted, reflexive behaviors to take part in things like planning, decision-making, problem-solving, self-control, and acting with long-term goals in mind." I like to think of the prefrontal cortex like a car's brakes.

Conversely, your [amygdala](#) is closer to the base of your brain. It's said to be older and more primitive. The amygdala is best known for processing emotions and behaviors that arise from emotions (especially fear). It's like the gas pedal on your car; you feel something, you're driven to act.

Studies have shown that when you're sleep deprived, there's a [loss of function](#) in the prefrontal cortex. Additionally, just one night of sleeplessness can impair your amygdala, making the [regulation of emotions more challenging](#).

### 2. Sleep tames your frenzy, providing perspective.

A sleep deprived person who encounters a stressor often feels everything as urgent and important. In haste to "get a handle" on things, our mind can become overactive, anxious, and frantic. The more chatter there is, the more we do, and instead of feeling better, we find ourselves overwhelmed. Our amygdala is an energizer bunny.

But getting refreshing sleep means that our fully-operational prefrontal cortex helps us pause and ask important questions like: "what's in my control, and what's not?" "What's the one best thing I can do in this moment?" We can see options, maybe even some bright spots. Clarity is easier to come by.

### 3. Sleep helps you question your automatic negative thoughts.

People with mental health struggles often have an abundance of [Automatic Negative Thoughts \(ANTs\)](#). These can range from “I’m so stupid so I have to work harder” to “No one would care if I just disappeared.”

A person who’s sleep deprived is more likely to accept ANTs as facts. When sleep keeps the prefrontal cortex in charge, however, it’s easier to step back and question them.

Sometimes it takes just one valid rebuttal for us to calm our amygdala and assess ourselves more accurately. This can increase our confidence in handling stress, helping build resilience.

### 4. Sleep raises your stress threshold.

Imagine a glass filled  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way with water; it won’t take much to overflow. The same glass that’s nearly empty can hold quite a bit.

When you’re sleep deprived, your amygdala has set your glass’s baseline high. It doesn’t take much for a stressor to flood over into strong ANTs or uncontrollable emotions.

Conversely, when you’re well rested, your functioning prefrontal cortex helps absorb some water from your glass, resetting you for whatever comes next.

### 5. Sleep gives you energy to flourish.

If you’ve ever had a poor night’s sleep, you’ve probably thought, “I just need to get through today.” And it’s true: the small amount of your available energy will be required to survive.

If you tend toward mental frenzy or ANTs, you’ll have little to no energy to quiet your mind or question thoughts. In fact, your awareness of these tendencies might disappear completely. And what we can’t see, we can’t challenge.

Even if you’re not suffering from clinical anxiety or depression, chronic insomnia can make slogging through your days the norm. You might feel “blah”, just going through the motions of your life (called [languishing](#)).

According to positive psychologists, flourishing includes “positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment”. While studies exploring the connection between adult sleep and flourishing are hopefully forthcoming, poor sleep has recently been shown to [negatively impact flourishing in school-aged children](#).

A single night of sleep deprivation can be enough to feel the strain on your mental health. To set yourself up not just to survive, but to ultimately flourish, “get thee to bed and rest, for thou hast need!”

### About the author

Kali Patrick is a Sleep Wellness Coach who helps stressed-out, busy professionals learn to sleep better & improve their energy. She’s also a therapeutic yoga & meditation teacher, and corporate wellness speaker. Learn more about Kali and her practice, A Journey Into Health, at [kalisleepcoach.com](http://kalisleepcoach.com).

“The best bridge between despair and hope is a good night of sleep.” –Matthew Walker

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