Exercise and sleep have both been shown to be vital for optimal health. The two function in a bidirectional way, with exercise leading to better sleep and a lack of sleep leading to a suboptimal performance the next day. It has been proven to decrease stress and improve overall mood. It not only strengthens circadian rhythms, in turn increasing daytime alertness but also helps us to get sleepy when it is time to go to bed at night. Research has indicated exercise helps to improve the amount of sleep we get while also putting our bodies into longer periods of the most restorative sleep, known as slow-wave sleep.

Regardless of age, sex, and race, higher levels of physical activity lead to better sleep. But, is that immediate? And do other factors come into play when determining these outcomes? Recent research done by Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine indicates there are a multitude of factors that come into play when trying to figure out exactly in what timeframe those positive effects of exercise are revealed. A group of adults, 55 and older living a sedentary lifestyle, also suffering from insomnia, were separated into two groups. One group maintained the sedentary lifestyle, whereas the other group was assigned 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 times a week.

To find the correlation they assessed how sleep could impact the quality of physical activity the next day and determined the following:

Exercise itself did not determine how one slept that night or on a day-to-day basis. Even after 2 months of the 16 week study period, the active group did not see any improvements in their sleep satisfaction scores. The 16 week mark, however, brought higher improvements in both sleep quality and sleep quantity. Despite not improving sleep quality immediately, the subjects who remained active demonstrated a significant improvement to their physical abilities the very next day. Shorter exercise duration was noted after a poor night’s sleep. Diminished exercise was seen more frequently in those that were most challenged with exercise in the beginning.

This suggests that those living a sedentary life have to do more work to get to the better sleep component, but all hope is not lost. This could seem disappointing, but take heart that exercise can improve sleep over time. The gradual build up to better sleep is not unlike how we look at exercise and the correlation to weight loss – stick to it and you will see results. Don’t be discouraged when first starting an exercise routine as there is no quick fix when trying to see results. A moderate exercise program combined with a good sleep schedule can and will provide significant benefits if done on a routine basis. Consistent effort will get you to your goals.

Caffeine works to reduce sleepiness by blocking adenosine receptors. Adenosine builds up in our system beginning when we awaken and peaks right before we fall asleep. By blocking these receptors, we don’t feel as sleepy. Since caffeine and napping can both improve sleepiness, the idea is to utilize both together to make the impact greater. This might be a reasonable option for some people who haven’t obtained adequate sleep the night before. Please be mindful to schedule a caffeine nap no later than 3 pm. If you have trouble falling asleep at night, caffeine naps are not recommended.
Pro Athletes share how they maximize sleep

By Kent Caylor, RPSGT

In an article in the September 2018 Men’s Health Magazine, 6 pro athletes are asked how they get the necessary rest they need. Of all the treatments these athletes can access to help them restore their strength, sleep is perhaps the most significant. The article goes on to state that the average adult needs seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

Although they come from various backgrounds with differing interests and schedules, these athletes all have one thing in common; they know the importance of sleep.

Jacksonville running back Leonard Fournette believes that “sleep is very important”, and says that his performance on and off the field improves with more sleep. He uses a bed that tells him what temperature his room should be to maximize sleep; it also records the number of hours he sleeps.

Green Bay Packers wide receiver Davante Adams takes sleep “pretty serious”. He tries to keep a regular sleep schedule throughout the week, and aims for eight hours of sleep a night.

[Arizona Diamondbacks infielder] Wilmer Flores believes that not getting enough sleep has a negative impact on performance. He tries to get eight to nine hours of sleep, making adjustments according to game schedules.

[Seattle Mariners] right fielder Jay Bruce says his sleep pattern has changed over the years, but believes that sleep is important. Although he doesn’t stick to a certain sleep schedule, he tries to get all the sleep he is able to. He does not let time zones get in the way either, but will just wake up spontaneously. He adds, “I definitely cherish my sleep. I think it’s important”.

Vikings cornerback Trae Waynes focuses on quality of sleep over quantity of sleep. He keeps a regular sleep schedule with the room as dark as possible, using a sleep number bed as his only sleep aide. He does try to get to bed earlier after a tough practice or game.

NFL Hall of Famer Shannon Sharpe says he doesn’t need as much sleep as he used to, and admits that he never did sleep well during his football career. Nowadays, as a T.V. Show host, he has a lot on his mind, and usually gets five to six hours of sleep, which he says is good enough for him. He also takes naps and tries not to exercise too close to bedtime.

Additionally, the NFL Players Association(NFLPA) considers sleep so important, they recently entered into a partnership with Sleep Number. Over 1,600 players are being offered a 360 Smart bed with SleepIQ Technology. the NFLPA plans on continuing this partnership, improving players performance both on and off the field.