

THE REST IS EASY: SLEEP STRATEGIES FOR ATHLETES

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A crucial part of Precompetition Strategy is to get a decent night of sleep the nights before competitions. Here are some methods to help you prepare for these events.

A. MYTH-MANAGEMENT: DISPELLING THE MYTHS ABOUT SLEEP

1. **Slow-wave Delta sleep is not crucial for rest to occur.** Alpha and Theta rest and partially drowsy sleep can be just as effective, especially in the short run, as in night before competition.
2. **Next day performance is not controlled by last night's rest!** The vast majority of factors that influence performance have to do with training and skill acquired long before competition takes place. Beware of scapegoating sleep, and selective filtering of coincidence and results.
3. **Mental Rehearsal** beyond one hour the night before competition is likely not more effective, and may actually diminish results. The most effective mental rehearsals the last night before competition are of the Ideal Performance State, less so for coping or refocussing strategies. Once you have done your IPS for a half hour or so, you are ready to move on.

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B. PREPARE YOUR MIND TO SHUT DOWN ANALYSIS

1. Early to mid-evening can feature rhythmic and relatively **mindless repetitive activities** e.g. light swimming and paddling in the hotel pool. Prepare to shut down Beta analytic thinking with regular repetitive mindless activities.
2. Start your evening rest routine **early enough** to allow time, but not so early you're not even tired. About 9:30 to 10:30 can be the beginning of your bedtime program.
3. TV is not generally recommended, because it encourages thinking and social interaction talking with your roommate. Your goal is to shut down logical thinking and focus instead on Alpha generation, visualizing pleasant scenes usually unrelated to your sport.
4. **Mark and park all problems and leave them for solution at another time.** Remember, problems are amazingly loyal; they will still be there next week. Don't even try to solve them tonight.
5. Some people may want to do **activation lowering methods** such as breathing techniques, PMR, imagery, biofeedback, yoga, tai chi, other meditation methods.
6. Some people may want to use **imagery techniques to empty the mind.**

C. PREPARE THE CRADLE AND THE BABY CAN SLEEP

1. Remember that **sleep cannot be willed or compelled.** In fact, the harder you try, the worse it gets. Your goal for now is merely to allow your mind to drift into pleasant memories and times, feeling heaviness in your limbs and torso.

2. **Ultradian Curve.** If sleep does not develop and you are riveted wide awake, perhaps go for a short 20-minute walk, then return to your room and begin the cycle again of emptying your mind.
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