

Enhance Your Dream Life

by Ryan Hurd



sleep better, dream more, live your purpose

Welcome! This e-book has three chapters for enhancing your dream life.

1. *Optimizing your Sleep Life.* Without a good night of sleep, dreaming is impossible. This chapter focuses on sleep health and ways to increase dreaming sleep.
2. *Optimizing your Dream Health.* Some foods, supplements and body practices that help with memory as well as keep the brain healthy.
3. *Preparing for Good Dreaming.* Tips, tactics and practices for creating a dream-friendly environment, including enhanced recall, less nightmares, and more insight into your passions and unfulfilled wishes.

Table Of Contents

Welcoming back your Dreamlife	3
The Continuity Theory of Dreaming	4
Chapter 1. <i>Optimizing your Sleep Life</i>	5
Crash course in sleep science	5
Go to sleep to dream	6
The power of the nap	7
Routinize your bedtime	7
8 tips for making your bedroom a sanctuary	9
Chapter 2. <i>Optimizing your Dream Health</i>	11
3 dietary tips for better dreams	12
Sleepytime foods	13
The secret of beer	14
Dream supplements	15
Powerful dream herbs	17
Chapter 3. <i>Preparing for Good Dreaming</i>	19
10 tips for keeping a dream journal	21
The Snooze Method for better recall	23
10 tips for lessening nightmares	24
Quick and dirty dream interpretation	25
Advance practice: Dream Incubation	25
A dream vision quest	30
Resources	31
Recommended books	32

Welcoming Back your Dream Life

Dreaming is part of being human, but in Western society we have to learn how to become good dreamers. Why is that? The answer is because dreaming is not valued. To be called a “dreamer” is to be out of touch with reality. “You’re dreaming” literally means “Your imagination is not relevant.”

But the dreamers I know are actually more in touch with reality. In fact, dreamers are in touch with two worlds simultaneously: the “real world” that we all share, and the private dream world where the *real work* is done.

What is the real work?

I’m talking about the “inner game” that is crucial for success in the world. Fact is, dreamers understand their emotions, their desires, and their fears better than non-dreamers. Dreamers are more in touch with their relationships, their family myths, and their health and sexuality. Dreamers are intuitive people and can avoid real life dangers. Dreamers know what they want and they know how to get it. In short, dreamers make up a core group of creative people who are healthy and happy, and we change the culture for the better precisely because we live in two worlds.

If you are interested in dreams but do not remember many of your dreams, you are in luck. Simply by adopting a few habits and changing some everyday routines, your



dreams will start coming back when you wake up from sleep every morning.

Dreaming well is a *feedback system*: the more you put in, the more you get back.

This report is a guide to remembering more dreams. You may want to start a dream group, interpret your dreams for wisdom and creative problem solving, or delve into lucid dreaming to take on your fantasies and fears, but it all starts with having good sleep patterns, a healthy dream diet, and good dream recall.

Building Bridges Between the Worlds — The Continuity Theory of Dreaming

Our dreaming worlds can be pretty different than our waking worlds, but we all have a natural ability to build bridges between them. In scientific circles, this is called the “continuity theory” of dreaming.

By cultivating dream-thinking into our waking world, we are inviting those dreams back into our daily life. So the practices, resources, and supplements I recommend here all are all for the purpose of building these bridges.



If you practice just half of these techniques, you will easily double your dreaming in the next month. If something does not work for you, try it again. If it still doesn't work or feel right, then let it go.

Dreams are mercurial and they don't necessarily come when called. So it's important to stay flexible and not put too much pressure on yourself. In fact, I have found that I am guaranteed to not dream well if I order myself to so. Dreaming tending is about creating a safe place to let the mind express itself, in its own time and its own fashion.

But if you work these exercises into your daily life, the dreams will start coming back.

They have been waiting for you.

Chapter I. Optimizing Your Sleep Life for Dreaming

There are a lot of sleep health resources on the web and I certainly encourage you to check out a few and see what works for you. (I've included my favorites at the end of this e-book).

However, many sleep-optimizing guides are geared towards people who are looking to get by on *less* sleep. While this can be done in a healthy way, unfortunately dreaming is often what takes the hit. So my sleep tips differ from many sleep gurus because I am not willing to cut out those precious dreaming hours.

A Crash Course in Sleep Science

Before we get into the basics of sleep optimization for dreaming well, we need to take a quick look at the biology of sleep.

Modern sleep science breaks sleep down into five stages. These stages are based on brain activity, and the brain cycles through all stages of sleep several times throughout the night. While these stages of sleep are universal, everyone has their own “baseline” for how long the stages last. In fact, finding out how long your sleep cycle lasts is an important step in sleeping and dreaming well.

Stage 1 – sleep onset, sometimes people hear voices and strange noises like bells.

Stage 2 – light sleep, the jumping off point to dreaming sleep (REM) usually.

Stage 3 – deep sleep, also known as slow wave sleep. If you're awakened from this stage of sleep, you are often disoriented.

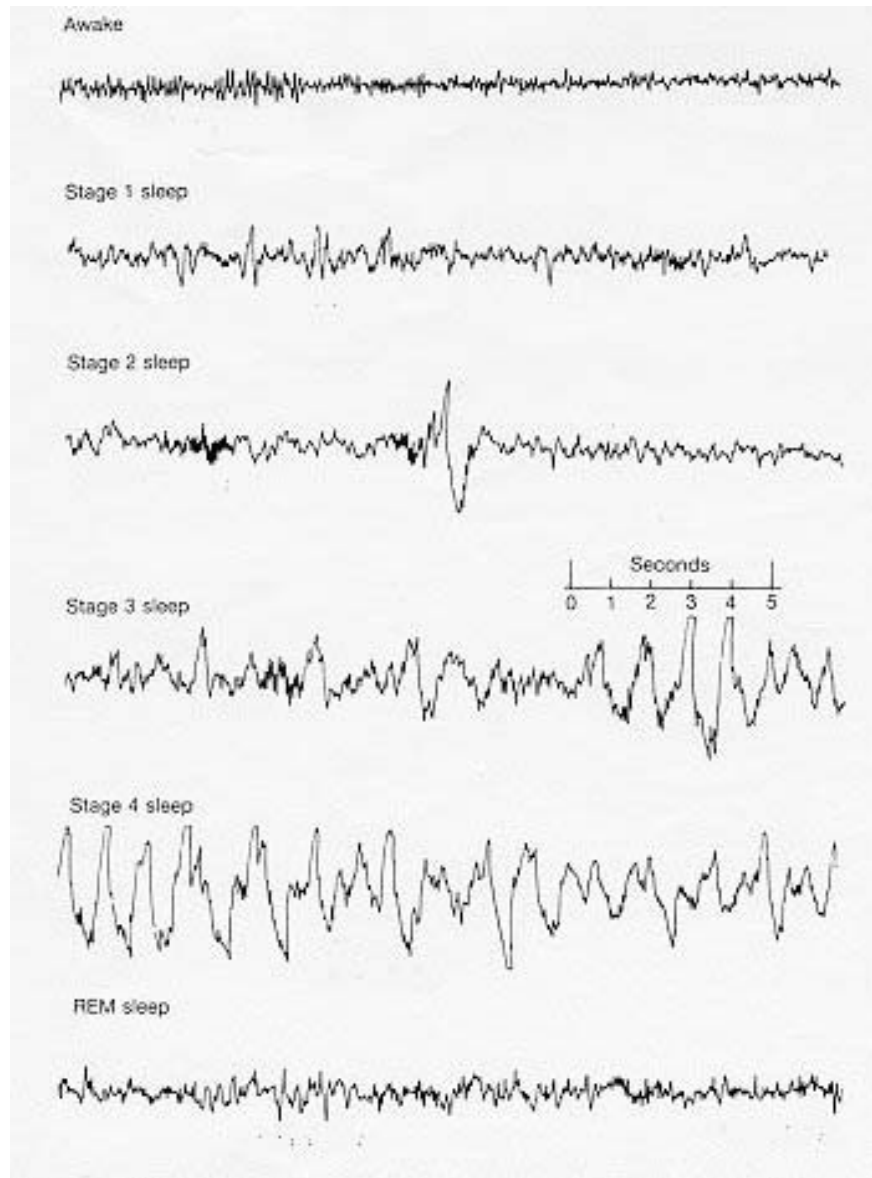
Stage 4 – more deep sleep — exclusively delta waves. You're dead to the world!

REM – Dreaming sleep, REM stands for Rapid Eye Movement. The rest of the body is under muscle paralysis to keep you from acting out dreams.

Below is a comparative look at brain activity in waking life and the 5 stages of sleep.

Note the similarity of the awake profile to REM sleep and Stage 1 sleep. The brain is far

from inactive when we sleep.



The average for cycling through these five stages of sleep is an hour and a half. You have probably heard that 7- 8 hours is the optimal amount of sleep — this is the average time to cycle through the stages five times throughout the night.

Go to Sleep to Dream

But each sleep cycle is not created equal. When you get less sleep, you jeopardize your time in REM dream sleep, which is strongest towards the end of the night. In fact, each

sleep cycle, we spend more time in REM, so by the early morning the dreams can last anywhere from 20-45 minutes. That extra last hour of sleep isn't necessary for physical health, but you can miss out on some great dreams.

So if dreaming is important to you, try to get at least seven hours of sleep a night.

The Power of the Nap

An alternative way to tap into some serious dreams is to take an afternoon nap. This is

particularly effective if you get less than seven hours of sleep a night. Because the mind wants more REM, your nap will most likely be chock full of dreams.

The added bonus, of course, is that an afternoon nap (or siesta) is healthier than loading up on caffeine when you get sleepy in mid-day. You will feel refreshed, and ready for more challenges at work than if you just grin and bear it. Many large companies have noticed that workers who nap are better and happier workers, and are installing nap rooms in their building.



If light pollution is in your way, try a sleep mask to block out all the light comfortably. Some masks have aromatherapy too, adding pleasing scents to lull you to dreamland.

And earplugs can be your best friend... they are very affordable and found at most drug stores. For light sleepers, I recommend earplugs with a Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) of at least 30.

Routinize your Bedtime

An important key to healthy sleep is to go to bed around the same time every night, and get up in the morning around the same time too. Our sleep clock (also called the diurnal clock) runs best when we keep it regular. Our sleep will be sounder and our daytime hours will be more alert.

If you want to get more sleep on the weekend, it's recommended that you go to bed earlier rather than sleeping in later. This will keep you on schedule and make Mondays less of a drag. But, to be honest, it can be hard to do that, especially if weekends are the time for late night socializing or kicking back. In this case, sleep in on Saturday but try to get up your regular time on Sunday.

Sleep before Tired

Get ready for bed before you are tired. This is counter-intuitive, but it's a lot like the adage of drinking water before you are thirsty. Going to bed exhausted and "passing out" does not mentally prepare us for sleep, and can result in a poor night's sleep.

A Quick History of Modern Sleep – Having 8 hours of unbroken sleep is actually a modern sleep style that became popular after the invention of the electric light bulb. In the past, and in many traditional societies today, sleep is broken up into two or three sessions throughout the night, with periods of social time in between. It was not



uncommon for people to visit each other's homes in the middle of the night for intimate conversations – as well as illicit sexual rendezvous that would not be smiled upon in public.

In fact, one sleep scholar calls our modern way of sleeping the "lay down and die" method!

8 Tips For Making your Bedroom a Sanctuary

An important part of getting good sleep is preparing for sleep. Beyond brushing your teeth and packing tomorrow's lunch, the real work is making it easy to downshift into a relaxing night.

The bulk of these tips are ways to help you make your bedroom into a sanctuary from the outside world. It should be clean, quiet, and feel safe. This can be reflected not only in how you set up your bedroom but also how you approach going to bed.

1. **Turn off the TV.** Don't watch television for at least an hour before bed, and don't fall asleep with the television on. TV in bed is a habit for millions of people, but statistically it leads to more cases of insomnia than it solves. Go a step further: don't have a TV in the bedroom. This is your sanctuary from the world, after all.
2. **Dress for Comfort.** Sleep in clean, loose clothing or nothing at all. Falling asleep in work clothes is just bad for the morale. Putting on pajamas an hour before bed is a great way to wind down too because the act is a ritual and a reminder that you are shifting to another state of consciousness.
3. **When to Read in Bed.** For some people, reading in bed helps to relax and fall asleep. But for others, reading in bed is something they do at any hour of the day. It is this second kind of reading in bed that should be eliminated because it can aggravate insomnia. The message is simple: keep the bed for sleep and for sex, or for activities that promote sleep and sex. Banish everything else!
4. **Keep it Clean.** Clean sheets, clean pillowcases, and fresh air. Don't wait for spring-cleaning; I recommend changing



- sheets once a week and airing out pillows every so often. It's so good for our mental health, but we often forget this simple weekly ritual freshens up our sleeping spaces.
5. **Clear the Air.** On that note, how does the bedroom smell? Fresh flowers in a vase, aromatherapy candles, or even small dream pillows stuffed with aromatic herbs are easy ways to reinforce the notion that this is your refuge from the outside world. Recent dream research has also shown that bad smells can increase bad dreams.
 6. **Reduce Noise Pollution.** Light sleepers are kept awake by erratic noises, but a consistent sound can lull you into dreamtime. When my neighbors are clunking around, I turn on a small electric fan. If that's too low tech for you, check out a [white noise machine](#). Devices like this let you go to sleep to relaxing sounds like the ocean, crickets, or a lightly babbling brook.
 7. **Lessen Electro-Magnetic Radiation.** If you can help it, don't place your bed in a way that your head is near an electric outlet or a water pipe. Keep electronics in the bedroom to a minimum. We are sensitive creatures, and simply moving the bed away from the sources of electro-magnetic disturbance has eased the suffering of thousands of people suffering from poor sleep. This is another reason to keep computers and televisions out of the bedroom (Tip 1). Personally, I turn off the router too and save myself the wireless network radiation. Of course, unplugging computers and entertainment systems is good for the electric bill too.
 8. **Light a Candle.** When preparing for sleep, light a candle to mark the transition into sleep. Or develop a similar ritual that works for you. Creating safety and relaxation in sleep is about creating strong boundaries, and this is a wonderful way to mark the evening. Even better if it's an aromatherapy candle. It's also great signal if you have a sleep partner: they will be less likely to pepper you with news or questions about daily life once you have entered your sleep-preparation space.

Chapter 2: Optimizing Your Dream Health

If sleeping well and dreaming more is your goal, there are many ways to nurture your mind and body during the day. The healthier you live your life, with an eye towards relaxing and developing your intuition, the more productive your dreamlife will be as well. Like I've said before, it's a feedback system, because the more you tend your dreams, the more rewarding life can be.

Let's start with exercise

When I am living a more active lifestyle, I am happier and with that come more restful nights of sleep and more creative and inspiring dreams. And more energy too. But if exercise is a chore, then I won't do it and end up feeling bad about myself.

So choose some moderate exercise that you'll love, something that scratches an itch besides "I'm exercising." Personally, I hate the gym. But I love to hike and be outdoors, so all the inspiration I need is a trail map for an area I've never explored. On weekends, I take a good friend with me and use the time to catch up. During the week I take solo walks in the evening before or after dinner.

The Importance of Balance:



Gymnasts report high dream recall and about twice as many lucid dreams than the public-at-large. (A lucid dream is a dream that you know you are dreaming while still fully in the REM dream state.)

The connection between self-awareness in dreams and gymnastics is balance. Those with a good sense of balance excel at the

cognitive task of knowing where the body is in space and time, a task computed in the vestibular system of the inner ear. So if you want more lucid dreams – take up a practice that develops your coordination, such as gymnastics, rock climbing, yoga or tai chi.

3 Dietary Tips for Better Dreams:

1. *Snack Lightly.*

Don't eat heavily right before bed. This really affects digestion and can cause sleep disturbances throughout the night. However, a light snack of simple carbs or milk can have a light sedative effect that actually rivals over-the-counter medication — usually tastes better too.

2. *Put a Cap on Night Caps.*

A drink before bed can be a sedative, but beware; it has long-term effects that can actually *promote* insomnia. By the way, both alcohol and marijuana act primarily as a dream-inhibitor. If you don't get much sleep (less than 6 hours), then you will miss out on a lot of dreaming. However, if you sleep in, these drugs actually can indirectly create a “REM rebound” effect that will promote long dreams in the second half of the night. That said, I would stay away from the habitual use of *any* substance to encourage sleep or dreams.

3. *Reduce your Caffeine Intake*

Caffeine is the most invisible drug in our society. Approximately 80% of adults in the world consume some form of caffeine every day. In the United States, the average adult takes in 300 to 400 mg caffeine, mostly because coffee is available in every office, restaurant, and even at streetside vendors.

It's hard *not* to be caffeinated these days.

But that mocha after work is still in the bloodstream by the time we go to bed. Make it a rule to not drink caffeinated beverages after noon, and you may see a difference in your sleep quality. Switch to black tea, or better yet, green tea, and you will still get a nice buzz but without the lingering effects at night.



Supplements for Good Sleep and Vivid Dreams

Some foods have been proven scientifically to be great for building mind power. If you are focusing on having more dreams, these foods will also help you with improving your dream recall. Many of the vitamins and enzymes I discuss below can also be found in supplements, but taking them in natural doses as they occur in fruits, meats, and vegetables is easier for the body to process. It's easier on the wallet too.

Sleepytime Foods

If falling asleep is a recurrent problem, you can start adding foods into your dinner diet that have a higher level of carbohydrates.

Tryptophan. To take your relaxation to the next level, include some tryptophan-rich foods. You've probably heard of tryptophan in turkey, but this amino acid is actually in dozens of common and delicious foods that don't happen to be meat. Tryptophan is a building block of serotonin and melatonin, so stocking up on it is like giving your brain permission to put itself to bed.

According to Wikipedia, fruits and vegetables with high tryptophan include: chocolate, oats, bananas, durians, mangoes, dried dates, chickpeas, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, spirulina, and peanuts. Don't forget potatoes, kale, cous cous, yams and watermelon. Oh, and if you like animal products: red meat, chicken, lamb, eggs, fish, milk, yogurt, cheeses like cheddar, Parmesan and cottage cheeses too.

But won't these foods, if eaten regularly, make you gain weight? Yes, almost certainly.

My recommendation: don't make an every night habit to eat a lot of carbs and fats before bed. Stick closer to the green veggies and mix it up with some herbal teas (described below). Bring out the big carb guns only every once in a while.

Melatonin.

You can also pick foods that are natural sources of melatonin. Melatonin is a gentle sleep aid, and it also can increase dream bizarreness. It is commonly prescribed as a [natural supplement](#), usually between 1 to 4 milligrams before bed. These natural food sources below have much lower concentrations, but may still be effective at low doses.



By the way, beware of high melatonin intake.... many health risks. You want to nudge your circadian rhythms, not knock them for a loop. Also, we don't have any data on the safety of taking melatonin supplements for long-term use.

Herbs with a lot of melatonin: Huang-qin, St. John's wort, and Fever Few. Each has over 4 micrograms/per gram of herb. This is literally a thousandth of the dosage used in Melatonin pills, but many people experience the benefits of more restful sleep.

Seeds with high melatonin: White mustard seed, Black mustard seed, Wolf berry seed, Fenugreek seed, Sunflower seed, Fennel seed, and Alfalfa seed.

And, strangely enough: Montmorency cherries have 15 nanograms of melatonin per gram. These cherries may be the perfect "nap snack."

The Sleepy Secret behind Beer: *Hops* is also a sleep aid, most effective in the short term as a carb-rich low alcohol beer. In fact, during the Protestant reformation, it became illegal in Germany to brew beer that did not include hops (This the infamous Bavarian Beer Purity Act of 1516). In a nutshell, the Protestant merchant class basically knew that those *other* beers (which included yarrow and henbane) were causing too many wild parties, while taverns where hops-based beer was served always winded down at night. But I can't recommend the *habitual* drinking of a beer before bed for many reasons,

including the extra padding on your belly as well as the mounting evidence that habitual alcohol use can contribute to long-term sleeplessness.



My personal “Don’t Fail Me Now”

Bedtime Tea:

Lemon, mint, rose hips, and chamomile. With a dash of honey or agave nectar, this warm, comforting brew will do the trick gently and safely.

Dream Herbs and Supplements

Below is my list of herbs and supplements that can increase dream recall as well as the vibrancy of the dreams themselves. Use with common sense, as many of these supplements can be dangerous if taken in excess.

Vitamin B-6

B-6 is a “brain vitamin,” and is known to help with many kinds of metabolism issues in the body. There is at least one scientific study suggesting that B-6 can aid in making dream more vivid and help in recalling dreams. It might have to do with B-6’s role in synthesizing melatonin, so this is a great vitamin to take with tryptophan or melatonin supplements... in low doses.

Stick to the natural sources of B-6 (meats, whole grains, many vegetables and nuts) and you don’t have to worry about a B-6 overdose (it’s like being drunk... a bad drunk). But you can easily find B-6 safely as a supplement in many multivitamins.

Omega3

Foods rich in Omega 3 fats are known as a brain food and help with memory performance. If you’re trying to recall more dreams, Omega3 sources will help with this too. The best sources of Omega3 are fish like salmon and tuna. Oh, don’t forget cod liver oil! But if that sounds as nasty to you as it does to me, it’s also available as a

supplement pill. There's even odorless pills too – highly recommended if you have a sleep partner!

Mugwort

Mugwort is a gentle herb related to sage and wormwood. It contains trace amount of



thujoles and other compounds that are known to have a proven effect on consciousness.

These compounds allow for the brain to have a larger availability of neurotransmitters during sleep, creating more vibrant and memorable dreams. It smells like a spicy mint, and grows in many places as a weed.

Go down to the river bank, or near a spring or lake anywhere in the temperate zone and you'll probably find some mugwort. It's been used for centuries as a "women's herb" and is associated with the Greek goddess Artemis. Smoke it, drink it like a tea, or put some underneath your pillow or in a dream pillow. I like to keep the dried leaves in a bowl, and crush some in my hand before going to bed.

If you can't find it where you live, here is my most trusted source for [organic mugwort](#).

Choline

Choline is an amino acid well-known for its consciousness effects. Choline promotes the neuro-transmitter acetylcholine, therefore enhancing the expression of REM sleep. So it may actually elongate dreams, as well as help with remembering them. It's cheaply found as a Lecithin supplement, but is also present in some common foods such as eggs, bananas, onions, soybeans, peanuts, potatoes, organ meat and plantains.

Many dreamers have reported that pairing choline with Omega 3s or with galantamine (see below) can induce vivid and memorable dreams. Here's my preferred [choline source](#), a very affordable supplement if bananas are scarce.

Powerful Dream Herbs

These next 2 dream herbs are not for the faint of heart. They have been used around the world — some for thousands of years — for inducing powerful and visionary dreams. I recommend proceeding with caution, and only try one at a time so you can isolate the effects. I also strongly recommend that you only try these dream herbs if you are also doing some of the mental preparations for dreaming listed in this guide. Taken without preparation, these supplements can lead to some intense dreaming experiences that can leave you more exhausted than before you went to sleep.

Galantamine



The most reliable dream recall supplement is galantamine. It is extracted from a few natural sources including red spider lily (pictured left) and daffodils.

Initially, research suggested galantamine is an effective supplement to reduce the memory-erasing effects of Alzheimer's

disease. In the 1980s, researchers noticed that galantamine increases dream recall and vividness of dreams too. More recently, Dr Stephen LaBerge provided laboratory evidence that galantamine can increase the chance of having a lucid dream too.

If you are interested in improving recall and vividness in dreams as well as pursuing lucid dreams, wait to take the pill until the middle of the night, before your longer REM periods of the early morning. Otherwise, you can risk increasing sleeplessness and sleep paralysis.

[Find Galantamine here.](#) This trusted medicinal-quality supplement source adds choline and vitamin B5 into the mix too, providing a one-two-three punch for dream enhancement.

Calea Zachitechihi aka the Dream Herb

Known as “the dream herb,” Calea Zachitechihi is from Oaxaca, Mexico and has been used for centuries by Chontal shaman/dreamers as a cure-all and a “voyaging” aid. The



scientific studies on Calea Zacatechichi suggest that it heightens the vividness of imagery in light sleep. Ingestion of the plant also decreases deep slow-wave sleep and REM periods. So the dreams that Calea directly promotes are the hallucinogenic dreams that occur at sleep onset and awakening (Stage 1 sleep, also called hypnagogia and hypnopompia).

Interestingly enough, however, the REM suppression of Calea Z. can provide a REM rebound if you get a full-night sleep, so it can indirectly promote vivid REM stage dreams too.

Here’s my [source for Calea Zachitechihi](#), harvested ethically and sustainably.

There are other dream herbs on the market, but the scientific research behind them is spotty. These include African Dream Root, African Dream Herb, and Salvia Divinorum (The “Diviner’s Sage”). According to anthropologists, these three have been used for eons for enhancing dreams.

If you are interested in learning more about these herbs, I recommend checking out [erowid.org](#). If you have a positive or negative experience with these herbs, feel free to drop me a line and let me know what you learned. Until more peer-reviewed studies are published, we must rely on each other’s personal experiences and bioassays.

Chapter Three: Preparing for Dreaming

Finally, here are some tips and practices that will truly maximize your dream life and make you a better dreamer. I didn't invent most of these tips — some are actually thousands of years old. These all have been helpful for me and people I know who didn't use to remember their dreams but now wake up with a head full of inspiration.

Unwind at Night

I covered this in Chapter 1, but it bears repeating. The more time you give yourself to transition into sleep, the better you will sleep and the more dreams you will have.

If I were forced to sum this up in an elevator pitch, I would say that the *single most important key to sleeping well and having lots of dreams is to treat your bedroom like a sanctuary*, and to develop a nightly ritual that quiets your mind, soothes your tensions, and gives you space to “check in,” rather than “checking out” through TV or reading.



Action plan: clean your room, clear your schedule and set the intention to treat your sleep life with the respect it deserves.

Tactic for Clearing the Mind – the Backwards Day

This is a practice to help clear your mind as you go to sleep. It will help prevent those “worry sessions” in the middle of the night that are unproductive and draining, and it will also pave the way to more creative dreams.

The practice is to spend 5-10 minutes thinking through your day: backwards. Start with the last thing you did before going to bed (flossing your teeth) and then what happened before then (read novel), and before that (watched “Matlock”), all the way until you woke

up in the morning.

Don't dwell on anything, just touch-and-go. And don't worry about remembering every little behavior... instead focus on the big ones, and especially the emotional moments of the day. That annoying client call, that scary moment driving to work when someone almost swerved into you, that flirtation with your co-worker. Again, don't dwell or try to analyze; the goal is to acknowledge what happened and your feelings about what happened, and move on.

Why is this technique effective? It basically steals the wind from the sails of those boring dreams that essentially do the same work, freeing up your mind to delve to the next level. Monks in Tibet developed this over 800 years ago as a dream meditation aid.

Drift to Sleep with Awareness

After going through this meditation, you will likely be sleepy. In fact, it's not uncommon to fall asleep when doing the Backwards Day Technique. As your thoughts wander, try to keep some awareness on the visual and auditory hallucinations your experience. This is an awareness-stretching exercise that will make remembering your dreams easier. It also can increase your chance of having a lucid dream. Common examples include the white stars that bloom, the sound of someone calling your name, the feeling of floating or sinking.

Why is this awareness exercise effective? The practice of noticing these experiences at sleep onset (also called *hypnagogic* hallucinations) is building those cognitive bridges between your waking sense of self and your dreaming self. Most people pass through this stage of sleep without awareness, so don't fret if it doesn't work for you. However, if you find this easy enough, you are a good candidate for some advanced dreamwork practices like lucid dreaming and dream re-entry.

The Dream Journal

Keeping a dream journal is a great way to set the intention to remember more dreams. It's also wonderful to have in the long run, so you can compare similar dreams over time and make new connections.

I have kept a dream journal since I was 15 years old, and am constantly surprised how my early dreams contain wisdom (usually in the form of brutal honesty) about my passions, my fears, and my highest hopes.

Everyone has their own way of incorporating a dream journal into their life. Here's the most effective tips that have worked for me.

10 Tips for Keeping a Dream Journal

1. Keep the journal just for dreams, no other purposes. No recipes, phone #s, to-do lists, or notes from class.
2. The journal can be a fancy leather-bound one or just a spiral-bound notebook you picked up at the grocery store. Whatever you choose, make sure you feel comfortable with the journal and that it feels "inviting."
3. Choose a special pen that is dedicated to use for the dream journal. Keep them together at all times.
4. Keep the journal on your nightstand or close at hand when you go to bed. Notice it before you go to bed and set an intention such as "I want to remember my dreams tonight." Have a small reading lamp or flashlight that you can turn on in the middle of the night if you awaken with a dream memory. If you sleep with a partner, it's important that you feel you have social permission to turn the lamp on whenever you need to. Also consider a [self-illuminated notepad](#) if you have a partner who awakens easily.
5. Journal after you wake up, immediately, before getting out of bed. If you just

- remember a few impressions, jot them down. If you are pressed for time, make it easy on yourself and write down a few phrases that will jog your memory later. See my **Snooze method** in the next section.
6. Continue the journaling process when you usually read the paper at breakfast or on the train on the way to work, or at your lunch break.
 7. In general, flesh out the most striking images and the most emotional bits. Don't worry about recording every impression if it is a long and detailed dream. If I did that, I'd spend my entire day writing down my dreams, and then it would be time for bed. There is definitely a point of limited returns.
 8. Be truthful to yourself about how the dream events work together – be conscious of the desire to make it a “tidy story.” This is called the “narrative effect,” when we adapt the dream memories into a single story after awakening. For example, if you are confused about whether something did or didn't happen in the dream, write down both impressions. Sometimes dreams run through the same experience multiple times, and some dream researchers even think that we may sometimes experience these multiple scenarios at the same time.
 9. Don't lose heart if it takes a week or even a month to remember your first dream fragment after choosing your dream journal. Be patient with yourself, and keep the journal in plain sight on the nightstand. If you haven't previously remembered a dream in over a year, it will take time to “reawaken” the recall.
 10. Reread your dreams from the night before as you settle down to sleep. You may be surprised that you remember more about the dream than you did when you first wrote it down at lunch. This is because we remember our dreams more when we are sleepy.... It's about state-specific memory.

Why does journaling help with remembering dreams? When we write, we are translating visual and experiential memories into words and stories, so the experience is turned inside out. Writing also uses a part of the brain that makes linguistic connections. So writing the dream down actually teases out these connections and makes them plain. (Freudian slips are a very common part of dream recording too – watch your misspellings for synonyms that may have some special significance.)

An interesting aside – laboratory research suggests that subjects just awakened from REM sleep do better at cross-word puzzles. This may be because REM sleep is more linguistically tuned-in than waking life, so metaphors and connections are more visible.

The Snooze Method for Better Dream Recall

This is great method for remembering dreams that takes advantage of how bodily position effects memory and recall.

The basic premise is to try not to move out of your original sleeping position when you wake up in the morning. If you woke up on your side, stay there and begin scanning for remembered dreams. Once you have run through the experiences, then grab for the journal and begin either jotting down the main points or the full dream (depending on your own morning schedule). Believe it or not, dreams are easier to remember when you are in the same position that you had them.



If you wake up by alarm, this technique can still work. Hit the snooze button and then lay back down in the same exact sleep position. You may fall back asleep of course, but try it again when the snooze goes off again. Like most mental habits, this will take a little time but after a spell it will become an automatic habit.

Why does it work? Body position holds the key to our mental and emotional health. Try putting your head in your hands and you will most likely start lamenting some aspect of your life. Put your arms in the air like you are praising the sun and you may feel elated. This is one of the principles behind yoga, and also is a clue to how our bodily habits can dictate our mood.

Lessening Nightmares

Nightmares are scary dreams that awaken us from sleep. If you have repetitive nightmares but hardly remember any other dreams, this is a clue that your dreamlife is trying hard to build those bridges. “Listen up!” the nightmare says.

However, if you follow the sleep tips and dietary tips in Chapters 1 and 2, you will naturally start having less nightmares and more positive dreams. Many bad dreams are encouraged by bad digestion habits (eating heavily before sleep) and erratic sleep patterns. Also, by incubating dreams you are meeting the nightmares halfway. Often what is so scary is being chased by something that wants to tell us something we don't want to hear! This guide is designed to teach you how to listen.

10 tips for Lessening Nightmares

1. Don't sleep on your back. This encourages a special kind of nightmare known as [sleep paralysis](#), in which you feel like you are being held down and cannot move. Sufferers also feel breathless and/or sense an “unknown presence” in the room.
2. Don't go to sleep angry or stressed out. Give yourself time to cool down.
3. More regular sleep patterns = better dreams. Routinize!
4. Cultivate gratitude. If this doesn't come easy, do a “thankfulness” exercise every day in which you list the aspects of your life that you are thankful for.
5. Reduce exposure to violent images and media.
6. Spend time in nature as often as possible, even if this means sitting in a city park for twenty minutes every day. Many therapists believe that we all suffer from “nature deficiency disorder.”
7. Start a body practice like yoga, walking, tai chi, or organized sports.
8. Role-play how you will face your fear the next time you have a nightmare.
9. Become part of a dream-sharing group. Many larger cities have them.
10. Cultivate self-love and acceptance. Easy to suggest, but hard to do. I use journaling to remind myself that I am loved. Affirmations — while they can

seem cheesy at first — are very effective as well.

My disclaimer: If you have numerous, repetitive nightmares that are related to childhood scenes or some personal trauma you encountered, I recommend seeing a counselor or therapist. Severe nightmares are a common symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which can be caused by war, devastating personal loss, rape, and suffering through a natural disaster like a flood, hurricane or landslide. Not everyone is willing to work with their nightmares, and would rather they just go away. But they will go away faster if you give them some attention head-on. Ministers are also good resources for dealing with nightmares if you attend a church; many are trained in working with the spiritual and traumatic side of dreams.

Quick and Dirty Dream Interpretation

Notice associations with the dream scene: are there feelings that connect these scenes to actual locations in your waking life today? What is different about your behavior in the dream compared to how you normally act in real life? What about the dream figures? Are they people in your life now or are they unknown? Focus on your relationships in waking life and see if anything “pops” up in response to dwelling on these dream figures. Again, the purpose isn’t to fix a meaning onto these dreams, but simply to build bridges between the worlds. Dreams are alive, so be wary of any interpretation that “translates” the dream to mean only one thing. Dream researcher Kelly Bulkeley once commented that a single dream can have over 30 levels of significance. It’s like peeling an onion, the deeper you go, the more layers you encounter.

Dream Incubation: An Advanced Practice

In our culture, we are taught that dreams are “random” and scattered. However, in ancient cultures, and in dream sharing cultures today, it is well known that you can ask for a dream on a certain subject. This effect is probably related to the *continuity theory of dreaming* I mentioned in the introduction. Simply spoken, the more we focus on our dreams, the more our dreams will focus on us.

This powerful method is the cornerstone to using your dreams to help live your purpose.



Dream Incubation is about clearing the path to your most sacred intentions.

So *dream incubation* is the process of asking a dream for guidance or clarity about a specific problem or issue. This technique can help with creative problem solving for your daily life, as well as delving into the past and clearing up old emotional traces that still haunt you.

You may want to contact loved ones who have passed on, either for information or simply for closure.

You could incubate dreams to provide

guidance for a health problem, a life decision, or for more courage in leadership.



A Dream Temple in Epidauros, 4th Century BCE, known as the cult of Aesclepius, the god of healing.

However you direct your incubations, central to the process is performing a waking life ritual before sleep, and training yourself to dream about a specific topic. This ancient art is actually surprisingly easy to learn, no matter if you are just beginning to remember dreams again, want to stir up those repetitive and boring dreams, or are interested in advanced kinds of dream healing or [lucid dreaming](#).

Below I will provide some specific activities and preparations so you can incubate a dream for whatever purpose you want.

Dream Incubation has three steps: preparation, the dream itself or a series of dreams, and finally giving a gift or honoring the dream.

1. **Preparation:**

In ancient Greece, patients would enter a dream incubation temple and stay there until they procured a healing dream. This could take up to four days or more. This is hard to do for most people today, but there is still an important lesson in the preparation of ritual separation.

If you are preparing to incubate a dream, I recommend going to sleep with more care than usual. Unplug the TV/computer, turn off the cellphone, and give yourself an evening of quiet peacefulness. You might want to light candles in your bedroom and take a long hot bath, all the while thinking about the topic you want some dream guidance on.

To take it to the next level, you could do some light fasting as well. For a week, cut down and then eliminate red meat and processed foods. Drop caffeine and alcohol from your daily grind. Eat only fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and simple foods like nuts. This can have an amazing effect on your dreamlife — and this exercise in willpower easily carries over to your intention for the dream.

But if that's too much to take on, just make sure you don't take alcohol after the early afternoon (assuming you go to bed around 10 or 11pm), and don't have any sugary snacks after a light dinner.

Making a Sacred Intention

When preparing for sleep, do some journaling on the topic. If you are looking for general life guidance, ask yourself questions like, “What is it I need clarity on?” or “What in my life needs attention?” If you have a specific issue you want to address, ask “How can I find a solution to this challenge?”

Journal about your intention to remember your dreams, and also to dream about this challenge. Take a moment and gauge the strength of your intention.... And be honest. If you feel only halfway engaged with this process, note that. Because a dream incubation can take a few days, this will be great data to review later and you may be able to get a feel for how strong intentions can lead to strong dreams.

If you are looking for physical healing, make plain what the problem is and consider doing a visualization exercise. This sure does sound new agey, but modern psychology has shown how *powerful* visualization is for boosting immune systems and speeding the time it takes to recovery from an injury. This truth is actually the foundation of modern sports psychology.

Some visualizations to consider:

- Imagine being bathed in healing light from head-to-toe.
- Or slip into a pool of warm, healing waters in your imagination.
- You probably have a place that you associate with peace and tranquility — often it is a place from childhood, a special church, or a secluded place in nature. Focus on being in that place and ask for a dream to take you there.



These are just a few suggestions, but it's up to you to find a visualization that fits with your worldview, your personal history, and your life path.

2. **The Dream:**

How do you recognize an incubated dream? You may not at first, to be honest. Write the dreams down as suggested in my tips for dream journals. Focus on powerful images, colors, and the emotional timbre of the dream. Give each dream a title as if it is a short story. For instance, “Uncle John cooks a Bean soup” “Sinking to the bottom of the ocean,” or “Exploring the Secret Room behind the bookcase.”

Try not to simply equate each image to your concern.... Let the dream breathe for a day or two, and when you make a strong connection, write it down, but let it go. Hold the dream loosely as if it were a fragile dandelion flower in your two clasped hands. Keep it

contained, and don't let it blow away.

After a couple days, re-read your dreams again. You may see the dream differently now, and if there are several dreams, you may even see connections between them.

3. Honoring the Dream

Dreams are actual experiences, not just metaphors. In other words, they are as psychologically real as any important memory we hold. So the real trick to valuing a dream is to know how to respect the song of a dream without tearing it apart. Instead, let it sing! In this way, the final stage of dream incubation is honoring the dreams that showed up.

3 ways to Honor a Dream (Without buying a dream dictionary!)

1. *Live in the uncomfortable parts.* What in waking life does this dream remind you of? Sit with the un-comfort until you can find its analogue in the present. Where in your body does the feeling live? Notice when similar feelings come up later.... This is the key to developing your intuition and strengthening that emotional intelligence.
2. *Give a gift.* If a tree sheltered you in a dream storm, thank a tree in your own way. If you had a dream argument with your long-dead family member, work on cultivating forgiveness. If you dreamed of drowning, go down to the ocean or a river and throw a stone into the waters. There's no recipe for this; be spontaneous and make sure every act is grounded in gratitude or thankfulness.
3. *Speak your truth.* Write the dream down, speak it out loud, or act it out. Some even do dream theater where people play out different characters in dreams to make it more real. Make the dream come alive... you may be surprised what you learn in the process.

A Dream Vision Quest for the 21st Century

It is well known in dream-sharing cultures that seeking a dream is a powerful practice. In the Navajo culture, this is still practiced today when young men go on vision quest. In Australia, dream seekers go on a “walk about.” Similarly, taking a trip away from your everyday life will have a powerful effect on your dreams.

I personally recommend a dream-seeking camping trip. Camping alone can be dangerous, but equally dangerous is a camping friend who does not understand your intentions. So choose your companion carefully. Sleeping in a tent or the open air encourages dreams, not the least because we don't sleep as soundly in the outdoors when we are accustomed to the quiet of the great indoors. But there are more subtle effects of nature on our consciousness as well. The orb of the moon, a sweet breeze, the sound of a coyote in the distance... this and the properties of the landscape itself can affect your dreams and bring new insight.



When the sun sets, we turn inward, and our own light shines brightly. Time to recharge the light!

Conclusion — the Importance of Setting Strong Intentions

I hope you have enjoyed this whirlwind tour about how to get more sleep, enhance your dreams, and live your purpose. If you incorporate just some of the tactics, habits, and practices into your daily life you'll never be without the guidance of the dream.

At the end of the day (or the beginning of the night), the most important thing I hope you take away is the importance of *developing your intention*, and learning how to focus on what's most important to you. When you do that, the dreams will follow, and they will begin to cook those issues, puzzles and creative fascinations while you sleep.

Resources for Better Sleep and Dreams – click and learn more

[National Sleep Foundation](#) – find sleep myths, and learn about sleep disorders

[Sleepnet](#) – learn more about sleep disorders and take a test to see how you fair.

Here's the [Sleep Warrior's guide](#) to natural ways to improve your sleep habits.

[The Sleep Queen](#) - My favorite "Sleep guru."

[International Association for the Study of Dreams](#) – many more links, resources and experts on the science and psychology of dreaming.

[Dream Gate](#) – a great resource for answering FAQs about dreams, nightmares, and how to work with dreams.

[DreamStudies](#) – of course my website should be on this list! Lately, I've been focusing on new dream research as well as how-to guides for working with dreams.

CC Image on page 28: [Liquid Dream](#) by ~jjjohn~

And a special Thanks to [madbadcat graphics](#) for the cover art and tech support!

My Recommended Books about Dreams and How to Work with Them

[Where People Fly and Water Runs Uphill: Using Dreams to Tap The Wisdom of the Unconscious](#) by Rev. Jeremy Taylor. This book is an approachable guide about how to work with your own dreams, including some insights into common dream themes and nightmares. Taylor is non-religious, yet has a spiritual approach.

[The Universal Dream Key: 12 Most Common Dream Themes](#) by Patricia Garfield, PhD. Garfield collected these themes from cross-cultural research, and discusses how to best honor the dreams with action in waking life.

[Our Dreaming Mind](#) by Robert Van De Castle, PhD. A sweeping history of the role dreams have played throughout history, with special attention to visionary and life-changing dreams, as well as psychic and lucid dreams.

[Dreams of Healing: Transforming Nightmares into Visions of Hope](#) by Kelly Bulkeley, PhD. After 9/11, Bulkeley wrote this book to show how nightmares are perceived in modern culture, and how they can be harnessed for healing. A powerful read.

[Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self](#) by Robert Waggoner. Hands down, this is the most mature and insightful introduction to lucid dreaming, or how to become more conscious in the dream. Full disclosure: I'm quoted in the book as a lucid dream expert.

[Extraordinary Dreams and How to Work with Them](#) by Stanley Krippner PhD, Fariba Bogzaran PhD and Andre Percia De Carvalho. A slim but crucial volume that is full of research and recommended practices for visionary dreams, including lucid dreams, initiation dreams and visitation dreams.

[Field Guide to Dreams](#) by Kelly Reagan. My favorite pocket guide to dream interpretation. Reagan lists many common dream symbols, discusses what Freud and Jung would have said, and balances this with modern dream work advice.