



Cranbury Therapeutic Massage  
60 N. Main St Cranbury, NJ 08512  
(609) 655-1801  
[www.cranburymassage.com](http://www.cranburymassage.com)

# Sleep Medicine



By Nancy Sheehan

An old Italian proverb states that “Bed is medicine,” in order to remind us that getting plenty of natural, restful sleep is an important component of any healthy lifestyle.

In spite of all we know about the importance of a good night’s rest, many claim that insomnia is reaching epidemic proportions in today’s world. If this is true, then a large part of the explanation must surely lie in the frenetic pace of modern life. Recently, spas have been offering private sleeping pods and napping services with the express purpose of helping people give themselves the rest for body and mind they so desperately need! Even in this fast-paced world, by examining our lifestyle choices and incorporating yoga, massage, and other “sleep medicine” techniques we can develop and maintain healthy sleep habits.

Good sleep hygiene mostly amounts to tried-and-true advice, including daytime tips and evening rituals. First, get into a pattern of going to bed and getting up at approximately the same time each day, even on weekends. Don’t exercise before bed but get moderate exercise during the day, avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening, and avoid heavy food close to bedtime. Create a wind down routine before bedtime; tell the mind it’s OK to let go. You’d be surprised how much your sleep will improve if you apply these tips routinely over time.

Creating a good sleep environment starts with a totally dark room. These days the impact of artificial lighting has been com-

pared to a drug in its physiological effects, producing, among other changes, altered levels of melatonin, the brain hormone that regulates our circadian clock, so be sure to sleep in a very dark room. Use blackout curtains if needed. Conversely try to get bright light exposure, sunlight is best, in the morning which helps reset your circadian rhythm. Be outside without sunglasses which block the sun’s full spectrum.

When sweet slumber evades us we may be stuck in a state known as arousal, where the sympathetic nervous system, the ‘fight or flight’ mode, is triggered. In this state your mind will race or your palms might sweat. Your body will secrete more stress hormones, and your temperature and metabolic rates will rise, as will your heart rate. By treating the arousal with a routine of soothing rituals you can bring your nervous system back into balance and transform your sleep patterns for good. Most important is to stimulate the parasympathetic relaxation response when we’re at the end of the day. Parasympathetic response is slowed breathing, reduced heart rate and increased digestive sounds.

A soothing therapeutic massage releases muscular tension and activates the parasympathetic nervous system commonly known as ‘rest and digest’. It won’t come as a surprise to learn that regular massage sessions will assist our body to return to a more normal state of operation, actually helping to reverse the physical changes that stress has created. Massage therapy supports good

quality sleep as well as greatly benefiting your overall health and well-being.

A program of relaxing yoga poses and easy meditation performed at bedtime can

# SLEEP MEDICINE

help you slow down mind and body and ease the transition to slumber. Restorative poses are best since they are often done in a supported, reclined position and invite relaxation. These poses reduce the activity of your brain's wakefulness centers and increase the activity of your sleep centers. Be sure to have blanket, socks and a sweater nearby when practicing passive yoga poses.

Breathwork is another excellent addition to your nightly sleep routine. "Every time you exhale, it slows your heart-beat and that helps calm you down," says Rodger Cole, an Iyengar yoga teacher and a research scientist specializing in the physiology of sleep. Try two part exhalation to one part inhalation. For example, start by exhaling through your nose to the count of 6 and then inhale through your nose to the count of 3. Do this for 5 to 30 minutes before bed.

Another great evening ritual is to keep a journal. Putting your thoughts on paper and writing down the contents of your mind will get your worries out before your head hits the pillow. Also when you go to bed you want your skin to be warm, so a hot cup of tea or a warm bath work wonders. Sleep with a little pillow of lavender blossoms or use a few drops of the essential oil to evoke soothing dreams. Eye bags, rice filled sacks that you place on your eyes, create a useful light pressure to the eyes to encourage relaxation.

Rodger Cole explains that we go through natural sleep cycles of deep and lighter sleep during the night. These cycles are about one and a half hours long. So if you do awake in the night, know that in another hour you can sync with that cycle. On the other hand, no matter how little sleep you get, you can feel energetic and refreshed if you relax deeply and completely instead of struggling to sleep.

Over time you normalize arousal and sleep starts to get better. You'll feel better overall with good sleep hygiene. Researchers have theorized that sleep helps our brains process information and can keep your heart healthy. So when you head to bed this evening, remember - getting a good night's sleep can be one of the most important things you do for your body and mind. There is no shortcut to good quality sleep. In our fast-paced, instant-gratification world we must buck the trend and support ourselves with good food, consistent exercise, and most importantly - a good night's rest. 🌙

*Nancy Sheehan LMT is owner/director of Cranbury Therapeutic Massage. For information visit [cranburymassage.com](http://cranburymassage.com).*

Services

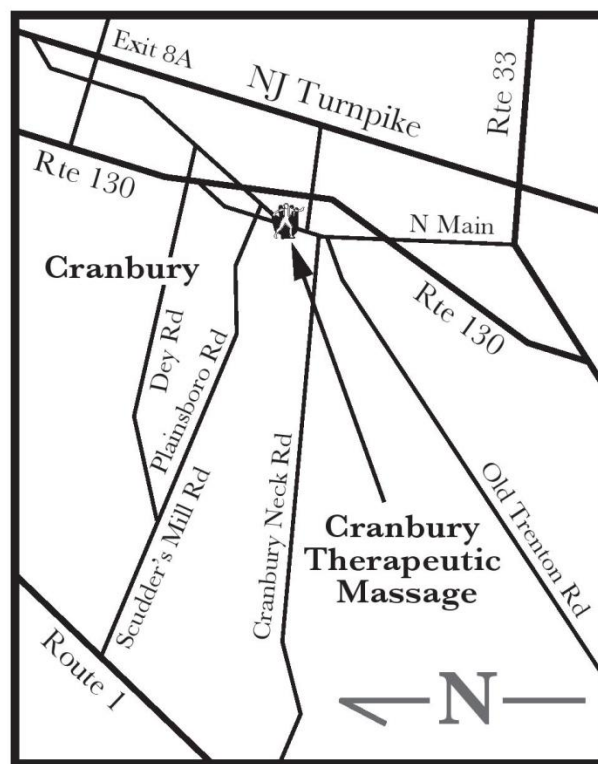
*Office & Home Appointments*

*On-Site Chair Massage*

*Gift Certificates*

*Aromatherapy*

*Yoga Classes*



609-655-1801

60 N Main Street

Cranbury, New Jersey 08512

[cranburymassage.com](http://cranburymassage.com)

online scheduling available