

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005, VOLUME 8, NUMBER 6

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If sleep is on your wish list, here are some tips to help you rest easier.

BY DEBORA M. COTY

A Mother's Fondest

Dreamzzzz

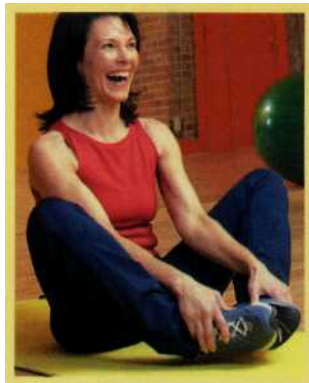
Once overheard a revealing conversation between two young mothers in a grocery store check-out line. One was draped over her cart, trying to comfort a whimpering baby while her toddler tossed a package of gnawed cheese at the cashier's head. The disheveled mother turned to the woman behind her, who was balancing a baby on one hip and a jumbo package of diapers on the other. Pointing to a tabloid magazine headline heralding, *Man Awakens From 30-Year Sleep*, she asked wistfully, "Doesn't that sound heavenly?" The other woman replied emphatically, "Oooh, yeah!"

Young mothers yearn for that rapturous rest, but it's terribly illusive. So how can we enhance those precious but few opportunities we have to sleep? Following are six techniques that I've found helpful:

Exercise regularly. Exercise (running after the kids doesn't count) is beneficial for inducing sleep at night. A brisk walk with the stroller, using a home fitness machine, or a favorite exercise video are excellent ways of cleaning out the mental cobwebs and simultaneously doing something good for you. But don't exercise within three hours before bedtime, or you may be stirring up the fire instead of dousing the embers.

Develop a routine. Sleep in a designated spot at a designated time. Routine is important for tipping off your body that it's time to shut down now. Otherwise, you're building more adrenaline.

Wind down. Discipline yourself to do something relaxing before bedtime, whether it's soaking in a warm bubble bath, or sipping a cup of hot herbal tea ... just remember, no caffeine.



Avoid using the bed as your work table. Condition yourself to use the bed for sleeping, so the mind will turn itself off at the desired time and place.

Pass the parchment. Write down all those "to dos" so you don't have to remember them. It relieves stress immensely to turn off those brain circuits and turn over the job of recollection to the mighty pen. Keep a pad by your bedside to jot down anything important that pops into your brain when dozing off.

Cuddle something. After pouring out consolation and reassurance to little people all day, it refills your own emotional teapot to receive physical reaffirmation. If available, a husband is a delightful source of soothing touch, as long as he understands that SLEEP is the end goal. A special stuffed animal or soft blanket (yes, adults may have pacifiers, too) can help calm frazzled nerves.

Meditate on God's Word. Reflecting on a favorite verse is a wonderful way to bring peace and relaxation to your soul. One of my midnight favorites is Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." The sweetest rest comes when we are secure in his love and ability to take care of us.

If all else fails, remember you're not alone — mothers have functioned in the same sleep-deprived state for thousands of years and have not only survived, but lived productive lives.

Married mother of two (Matthew and Cricket), **Debora Coty** lives in central Florida (better known as Hurricane Alley), and juggles working as a freelance writer, speaker, piano teacher, and occupational therapist. She enjoys writing magazine articles and a monthly column in *The Christian Voice* newspaper.