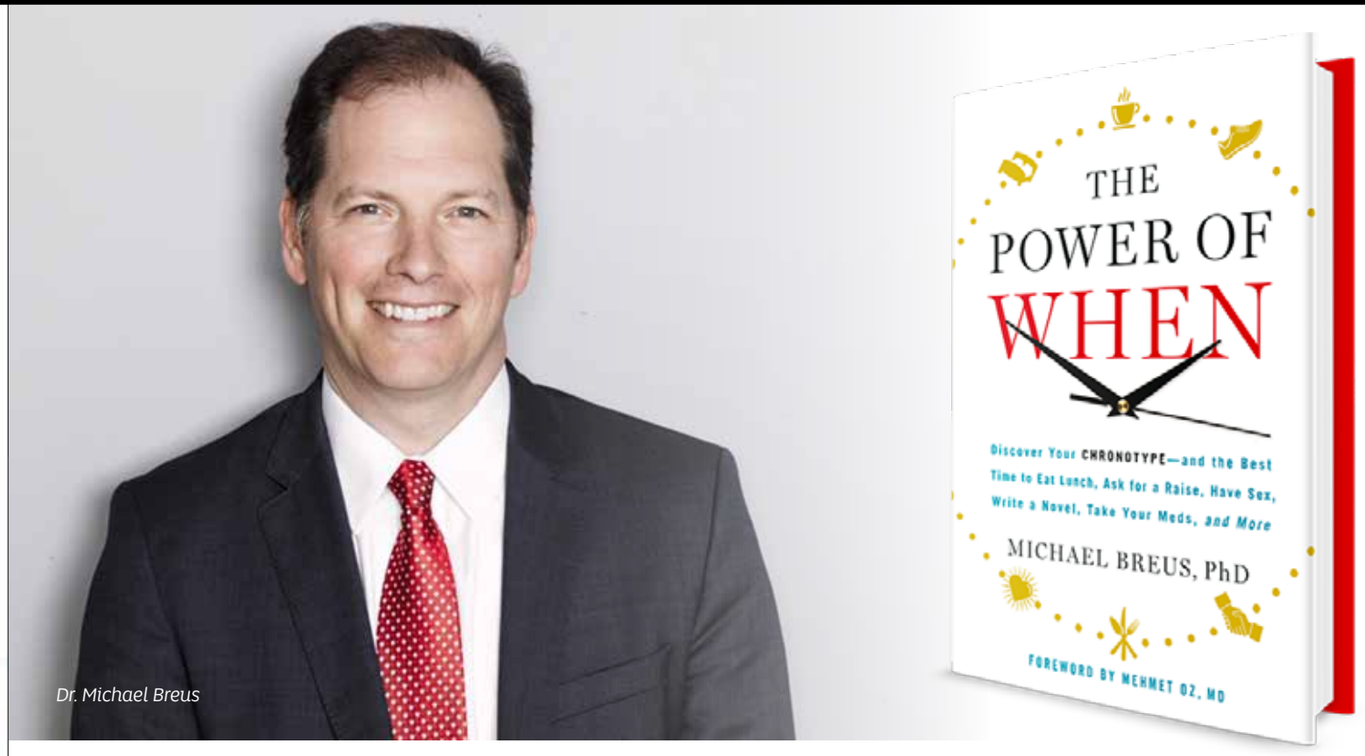

Dr. Michael Breus

SLEEP BETTER THROUGH A PANDEMIC OR ANYTIME FOR THAT MATTER

Measure and bio-hack your sleep for optimal performance

Lydia is a passionate advocate of healthy living. She has launched and positioned many health and wellness-related companies, products, technologies and organizations receiving more than 100 awards nationally and internationally. Her focus in the health sector is specifically on life sciences, aging and longevity. She is a partner and investor in several recognized national brands. She sits on the board of the Buck Institute for Research on Aging whose mission is to eliminate the threat of age-related disease for today's and future generations. It is the only independent research organization globally dedicated to extending the healthy years of life. Like the scientists at the Buck, Graham envisions it will be possible for people to enjoy life at 95 as much as at 25. To support Buck's mission, please visit www.buckinstitute.org.

If someone promised a miracle cure to improve your vitality, appearance, hormone balance, immunity, weight, and overall health and longevity, you would probably believe that person was kidding, right? And, place an order immediately? Well, the miracle cure is good quality sleep. It's free and we do it every day—just some of us are better at it than others. Here lies the conundrum.

I have always been a good sleeper but hear the war stories from friends and family who struggle for a good night's sleep. What's worse is their bedtime dread and anxiety often become a self-defeating and fulfilling prophecy, making it even harder to get to and stay asleep.

Although sleep is the third pillar of health, along with exercise and nutrition, America is currently experiencing a sleep crisis. While some individuals have actual sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, many suffer sleep disturbances from stress and life imbalances exacerbated by long work schedules, commutes, and always-on electronics. These all contribute to significant disruptions in our circadian rhythm, the ongoing ebb and flow of hormones, enzymes and circulatory activity reflected as our biological clock over the 24-hour day. These unnatural disruptions often produce a sustained cortisol level or escalate cortisol at exactly the wrong time of day. While much of what happens during sleep remains a mystery even to the neuroscientists and researchers studying it, we are learning more about its importance.

As consumers, we are becoming more empowered to learn about and measure our own sleep via different devices and apps. The Oura ring (https://ouraring.com) is my favorite. It's easy to wear and measures a variety of sleep variables: the amount and timing of REM sleep (when we dream), deep sleep (when we restore)—some question how accurate the deep sleep reading is; but, in any case, it's a good gauge—and light sleep as well as the total time you are asleep and awake each night. It also measures overall sleep quality and restfulness. Each morning when you sync your Oura, you will receive a sleep score for the night before. Overall, this is helpful and interesting to see the correlation between a late dinner, time on devices late in the evening, or a cocktail at dinner, and the impact on sleep.

One of the attractive features is that Oura continues to measure while in airplane mode. As a bonus, Oura also tracks a variety of other activities such as steps (in airplane or active mode), readiness to tackle workouts (a few extreme athletes have experienced issues with that reading), calorie burns, and heart rate variability. Overall, Oura has helped me become more actively aware, engaged, and interested in my sleep quality in an effort to achieve some of the benefits of a good night's sleep.

While measuring sleep may seem like a rather pas-

PHOTO CREDITS: COURTESY OF MINDWORKS, INC.

Dr. Michael Breus speaks at Health Longevity Weekend

Oura ring and app

sive process, sleep management or biohacking one's sleep for optimal performance throughout the entire day can be a rather active, and even fun, process.

Many of us are familiar with popular sleep advice such as: maintain a regular sleep schedule (go to bed and get up at consistent times); turn-off blue light devices and the TV early in the evening; limit napping; eat two to three hours before bedtime; keep your bedroom cool; limit alcohol and stimulating activities such as news consumption, violent TV shows, etc.; try relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing; turn off Wi-Fi; and even try modifications in lighting to help promote sleep in the evening. However, many folks with sleep issues, even after trying all these, are left tossing and turning and waking up tired. Not to minimize these interventions as they should be part of a healthy personal sleep practice, but, putting aside a serious sleep condition such as apnea or narcolepsy, etc., there just has to be more to it.

That's what I discovered when I met Dr. Michael Breus, a.k.a. "America's Sleep Doctor" (https://thesleepdoctor.com), a highly esteemed sleep doctor and sought-after sleep coach, at my recent Healthy Longevity Conference (see March-April issue). He had a refreshing and practical take on sleep based on chronobiology, the study of circadian rhythm and its effect on human health and wellness. By harnessing it properly, he suggests, we can make adjustments for not only achieving better sleep, but also for better performance while we're awake. It's a bio-individual approach, not the usual one size fits all. In our families and workplaces, we have all witnessed (and sometimes envied) those energetic morning folks as well as the ones who seem to come alive at night just as the rest of us wind down. These differences are not by accident, Dr. Breus explains, but are the result of genetic chronotypes. Dr. Breus identifies four basic ones:

Dolphins - insomniacs, intelligent, neurotic light sleepers with a low drive for sleep (about 10%)

Lions - morning-driven optimists with a medium drive for sleep (15-20%)

Bears - fun-loving, outgoing people who prefer a solar-based schedule and have a high drive for sleep (50%)

Wolves - night-oriented, creative extroverts with a medium drive for sleep (15-20%).

Breus notes that when we were hunter-gatherers and lived in tribes, this genetic diversity served us well as a species for millennia and protected the tribe from predators. The dolphins would take the all-night shift of guarding because they were light sleepers. Next, the lions took the early morning shift. The bears would hunt and gather in the daylight and the wolves completed the cycle as they took the evening shift.

The problem, however, came with the invention of electricity, the Industrial Revolution, and later the technology revolution, as most of us began to conform to a schedule dictated by society and not by our own genetic predispositions. Breus explains, "These four types don't run on the same bio-time. It took us only 123 years to undo 50,000 years of perfect bio-time keeping. Saying that our physiology hasn't evolved as quickly as our technology is the understatement of the millennium."

So, what can we do? While the bears dominate today's social and business schedules and leave the rest of us to adjust, the answer lies in embracing (rather than fighting) our own chronotype and following its unique rhythms as best we can. The first step is identifying your chronotype. Breus provides a simple quiz to help you determine this on https://thepowerofwhenquiz.com. Once you have that, he explains how to harness your individual bio-time by understanding the "power of when" to rise and go to sleep and when to undertake different activities throughout the day and evening for optimal health, achievement, creativity, or simple enjoyment. To learn more about this, check out Dr. Breus' book, The Power of When, for more detailed information. (The book contains charts and suggestions on when to do what for each chronotype.)

Each chronotype has its positives and negatives. There is no ideal—it's just yours, so embrace it! Funny, many folks want to be those early-bird lions, but this chronotype, for example, has the downside of frequently falling asleep on the couch by 9:30 p.m., which can put a cramp on evening socializing. As with each type, Dr. Breus suggests certain bio-hacks for better sleep and daytime performance: for example, how the lion can get an extra hour of awake time in the evening without interfering with evening sleep.

Understanding your chronotype can help you uncover your true sleep pattern which, in turn, will help you sleep better which ultimately will impact the quality of your life in all areas—as a romantic partner, manager, or parent. For example, I once had an employee who just could not get into the office early, but who produced high quality work. By simply adjusting his hours to a mid-morning start and an evening finish, the result was a highly productive, happy, and loyal employee.

And, for you couples who might be different chronotypes, Breus covers how to navigate that, too. It might just save your relationship or marriage. Ultimately, harnessing your chronotype's unique circadian rhythm and getting better sleep might just extend your life, and you'll feel healthier and happier in the meantime.

Sleep truly is the best miracle cure around—so, sleep well!

PHOTO CREDITS: (LEFT) COURTESY OF KODIAK GREENWOOD, (RIGHT) COURTESY OF OURA RING