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After years of running a serious sleep deficit, LEAH RUMACK tries a new tack.

ROCK-A-BYE BABY

It seemed perfectly logical at the time: My feet were freezing, so I kept my socks on when I stepped in the shower. I put the milk in the cupboard and the empty cup in the fridge. I had a conversation with someone and didn't remember it the next day.

It's not my fault.

It's just that I've been awake for about 17 years.

I'm what health practitioners call a "chronic insomniac." I've gone on as little as one hour of sleep more times than I can count. Six hours is a good night. Eight hours happens only when I drug myself into oblivion and ban my snoring fiancé, Jason, from the bed. You know how you feel when you've been up all night on a red-eye flight and have to go straight to work in the morning? That's me about half the time—or, rather, about a third of the time, thanks to my pretty little pills. (I find it amus-

ing that the various sleeping pills my doctors have prescribed over the years are all pink.) Then there's the wretched random sobbing, missed workdays and workouts, cancelled social plans and strained relationships.

Sometimes, when I'm watching a movie and a character is in a coma, I think to myself: "See? That looks nice."

You can't take pills forever. You develop a tolerance, for one thing. And you rotate among side effects—ravenous hunger, memory loss, brain fogginess, lack of sexual desire and response, emotional flatness and, worst of all, the increasing panic that you can't sleep without them. On top of that, there's the stress of fretting about the long-term health effects of years of sleep deprivation, including an increased risk for heart attack, stroke, diabetes and obesity.

So when I get invited to a sleep-themed Rest & Rejuvenate week at the luxury Canyon Ranch health resort in Tucson, Arizona, I can hardly believe my exhausted little ears. The Ranch is going to save me! It has to.

Jason is becoming irritated by my not-infrequent work trips, so I gingerly tell him I'm going away again. He gets up and stalks out of the room.

"But it's for a sleep retreat! I'm going to learn how to sleep!" I call after him. He immediately turns, marches into the basement and fetches my suitcase.

Canyon Ranch has a dizzying range of sleep-related lectures and workshops, and facilities for a full medical sleep study to see if you have sleep apnea or neurological issues. (I don't.) I arrive at the plush but simple mountain resort and find they've put me in a room with an Ambient Therapy sound system. Various nature noises are arranged with music in supposedly relaxation-inducing algorithms and piped through the stereo—it certainly bests the little battery-powered sound machine I take on trips. The bed is fluffy, and there are »

no noisy bedmates, no cellphones or deadlines, and nothing to do tomorrow but learn to sleep—though I am slightly miffed that breakfast is only served until nine. This is a sleep week, people! The place is full of insomniacs. I pop a pill and sleep like a baby. What? I can't risk being tired for this.

On day one, I start my official relaxing at a restorative yoga class. When I used to do yoga, I often skipped shavasana—that part at the end when you lie there in corpse pose. I considered it dull and a waste of time. (This probably says a lot about why I don't sleep.) The class is basically an hour of shavasana in different positions, meant to stimulate the lymphatic system and various organs. Unfortunately, I don't make it to my planned meditation session afterwards because I become nauseous during yoga and promptly throw up at the end of class. Probably something to do with all the lymphatic stimulation, or perhaps it shows just how bad I am at resting. I rally in time for the "Rest & Rejuvenate: The Path to Self Awakening & Prosperity" lecture by therapist and "spiritual services provider" Jenny Simon, which is basically a chat about how sleep is good for you. "I know you're hiding in the bushes texting each other," she says to all of us adrenaline junkies. "The number one thing people say to me is, 'I can't shut my brain off.'"

The next day, I'm signed up for a sleep-therapy session, which turns out to be a quick primer in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), widely considered to be the gold standard in treating insomnia. I've just never been able to bring myself to pay \$150 a session for the fairly long period you're supposed to do it. CBT teaches you to break the self-fulfilling pattern of negative thoughts and behaviours: "Oh, my God, I just looked at the clock, it's 2 a.m., I'm never going to get to sleep—my day tomorrow is going to be a total disaster!" Guess what happens when you start worrying that your day is going to be a disaster because you can't sleep? You don't fall asleep.

Therapist John Shukwit runs through the usual questions (Sleep apnea? No. Clinical anxiety? Depression? Restless legs? No, no and no) and quizzes me about my patterns around sleep.

"Well, I do look at the clock when I wake up early, to see if it's time to feed

the cats," I confess.

"Aha!" He pounces. "The clock."

We decide that feeding the cats will be Jason's job, so I never have to look at the tortuous clock, and set a few behavioural rules: no caffeine after noon, and nothing that stimulates my circadian rhythm before bed, especially computers or tv. None of this is news to me, but implementation has been lacking. But that's it! I'm going on a strict, proper sleep diet, and it starts right here, right now. Shukwit leads me through a short meditation, in which I try to focus on my breathing for one excruciatingly long minute.

"How was that?" he asks.

"Boring," I respond.

"This is the problem," he says, peering over his glasses at me. "Relaxing is boring; sleep is a necessary evil."

Over the next two days, I attend several more classes that are extended variations on meditation and CBT, and, in one terrifying lecture, Dr. Phil Eichling, the Ranch's sleep specialist, succeeds in convincing me of something where all of my friends have failed. He gives us a stern talking-to about the "half-life" of caffeine, which is about seven hours. This means there is still half a serving of caffeine in your blood seven hours after your first latte, and an eighth of a serving is still there the next morning. Turns out that what I thought was a reasonable intake—about three servings of coffee before 2 p.m.—means that I constantly have caffeine in my system.

"NO MORE STARBUCKS," I scrawl in my notes.

Back from the Ranch, I faithfully slash my coffee intake, turn the clock to the wall, and do the stupid, boring meditations when I'm lying awake in bed, obsessing about how tired I'm going to be tomorrow, and/or planning to kill Jason (who's snoring)—or myself, whichever is more convenient. I start to take my drugs less often as I slowly regain confidence in my ability to sleep. Months later, I'm still struggling, but my pill-popping has dropped to about three times a week, as opposed to five. Most mornings, I triumphantly announce my non-medicated sleeps to my ever-hopeful sleep cheerleader.

"Honey, the Ranch saved me!"

It didn't really, of course. But like any diet, it's a start. □

The next Rest & Rejuvenate week is October 25-31. Visit canyonranch.com.