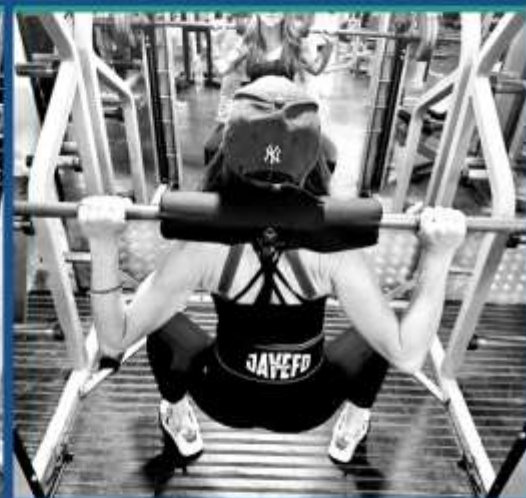
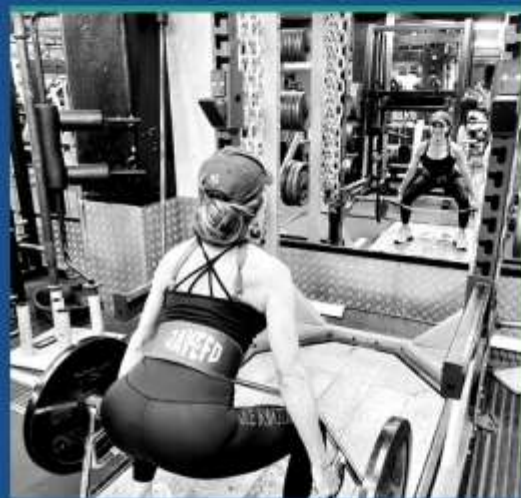




THE GOOD SLEEP GUIDE

FOR STRENGTH

How Sleep Builds Muscle, Fuels Recovery
and Powers Performance

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About Sammy Margo

Foreword

I have a confession. For years, I trained harder than almost anyone I knew. I tracked my macros, optimised my programming, hired the best coaches. And yet, there were plateaus that made no sense. Recovery that felt sluggish. Days in the gym that felt like wading through treacle despite doing everything right.

Then I started looking properly at my sleep.

Not just whether I was getting enough hours, but what was happening during those hours. The quality of my deep sleep. My REM cycles. My heart rate variability overnight. My readiness scores. And what I found changed everything.

As a Chartered Physiotherapist with over 30 years of clinical experience including as the first female physio in English professional football, I have spent my career understanding how the body builds, recovers, and adapts. I wrote *The Good Sleep Guide* and *The Good Sleep Guide for Kids* because I knew sleep was important. But this book exists because I now know sleep is foundational.

When readers of my first book started writing to me athletes, gym-goers, coaches, personal trainers, asking specifically about the sleep-strength connection, I knew I needed to go deeper. What does the science actually say? What happens inside the muscle while you sleep? And increasingly: can technology help us understand and optimise this process?

That last question is what leads us into the next chapter of this conversation which is 'if you can measure it, you can change it.' And thanks to the wearable technology now available to all of us, we can measure more than ever before. Sleep stages. Recovery scores. Overnight heart rate. Respiratory rate. Skin temperature. The data is remarkable and getting even better.

In my next e-book *The Good Sleep Guide for Health Tech*, I will show you exactly how to use that data to drive real results.

But first, the science. Because understanding why sleep builds strength is what will make you take the data seriously.

Sammy Margo

Introduction: If you can measure it, you can change it.

Imagine two athletes. Same training programme. Same nutrition. Same gym. One consistently makes gains, stronger, leaner, more powerful month after month. The other plateaus, picks up niggly injuries, and feels perpetually tired despite resting.

What's the difference?

In most cases I've seen clinically, it comes down to one thing: sleep.

Not just the number of hours, though that matters. But the quality, the architecture, the consistency. And increasingly, whether the athlete has any idea what their body is actually doing between 10pm and 6am.

Sleep is not passive downtime. It is the most anabolically productive period of your day. This is when growth hormone surges. When muscle protein synthesis peaks. When your nervous system catalogues and consolidates the neuromuscular patterns that you practised at the gym. When inflammation resolves and tissue repairs.

The research is unambiguous, and I'm going to walk you through it in plain language, with real stories, real numbers, and real strategies you can implement tonight.

This guide also serves as a bridge. Because the next evolution in sleep and strength optimisation isn't just about understanding the science, it's about measuring it in real time. Wearable devices now give us access to data that was previously only available in sleep laboratories. And the question I'm increasingly asking my clients, my athletes, and myself is: you have all this data now and are you using it?

Nearly 50% of adults in Western countries are chronically sleep-restricted

Getting less than the recommended 7-9 hours per night with profound consequences for muscle health, recovery, and strength performance. (Easow et al., 2025)

This guide will give you the foundation. Let's start with the crisis hiding in plain sight.

Chapter 1: The Sleep Deprivation Crisis

Meet Sarah

Real-World Story

Sarah is 38, a marketing director and committed gym-goer. She trains five days a week. Weights in the morning, occasional runs in the evening. She eats well, takes her supplements, and has a good coach. But she's been stuck at the same squat weight for four months and keeps getting minor strains that won't fully clear. She sleeps about six hours a night. She thinks that's fine. 'I function perfectly well on six hours,' she tells me. She doesn't.

Sarah is not unusual. She represents a pattern I see constantly in my clinic and in conversations with fitness professionals across the country. People who are doing most things right, but whose sleep is quietly undermining everything else.

The research tells us that nearly half of adults in Western countries are chronically sleep-restricted, consistently getting less than the 7-9 hours that evidence supports as optimal. And here's the critical point: most of them don't know it's a problem.

Understanding the Types of Sleep Impairment

Not all inadequate sleep is the same, and it's worth understanding the distinctions, because the consequences differ:

- Sleep Deprivation - a significant acute reduction in sleep, such as an all-nighter or severe restriction to 2-4 hours. Rare in everyday life, but informative in research because the effects are dramatic and measurable.
- Sleep Restriction - the Sarah scenario. Consistently getting 5-6 hours when your body needs 7-8. This is the most common and most underestimated form of inadequate sleep.
- Poor Sleep Quality - enough hours in bed, but the sleep is fragmented, shallow, or non-restorative. You may feel you sleep 'fine' while your body is quietly failing to recover.
- Sleep Disorders - conditions like obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) that structurally disrupt sleep architecture, often without the person being aware.

💡 **Sammy's Tip:** If you've been using a wearable device and notice your deep sleep is consistently below 15-20% of your total sleep time, or your HRV is trending downward week on week, that's your body telling you something. Don't ignore it.

Who Is Most at Risk?

Shift workers are the most obvious group, but the list is much longer. Athletes with heavy training loads, new parents, people in high-pressure roles, anyone travelling frequently across time zones. Research consistently shows that even highly motivated individuals cannot compensate for inadequate sleep through willpower, caffeine, or determination. The physiology simply doesn't work that way.

And here's what I want you to hold onto as you read this book: the consequences of chronic sleep restriction for muscle health are far more serious than almost anyone realises.

Chapter 2: What Sleep Deprivation Does to Your Muscles

Meet Marcus

Real-World Story

Marcus is 44, a powerlifter who runs his own accountancy firm. He's been training seriously for six years. In the run-up to a regional competition, he ramped up both his training volume and his work hours, averaging around five hours of sleep for three weeks. His lifts dropped. Not slightly but significantly. His bench press lost 8kg. His deadlift, which had been progressing well, stalled entirely. He assumed it was overtraining. He wasn't overtraining. He was under sleeping.

Marcus's experience is backed by a 2025 systematic review of 13 studies examining sleep deprivation and muscle strength (Easow et al., Sleep and Breathing). The findings were clear and consistent: both acute and chronic sleep deprivation result in measurably reduced muscle performance.

5 nights at 4 hours sleep = significant reduction in myofibrillar protein synthesis

Even with adequate protein intake. This is the process by which your muscles build new fibres and repair damage and sleep restriction directly impairs it. (Saner et al., Journal of Physiology, 2020)

It's Not Just About Being Tired

Here's what many people get wrong. They assume the reason sleep-deprived athletes perform worse is simply fatigue including reduced motivation, lower pain tolerance, less drive. And while those psychological factors are real, they're only part of the story.

Groundbreaking metabolomics research published in Physiology & Behaviour (2026) revealed something far more fundamental: sleep restriction changes the cellular chemistry of your muscles. When researchers examined what was happening at the metabolic level in sleep-restricted subjects, they found:

- A measurable shift away from efficient oxidative energy pathways - the body becoming metabolically less efficient at producing the energy muscles need.
- Reduced concentrations of amino acids critical for the Krebs cycle and neuromuscular function - including alanine, glutamine, glycine, lysine, and others.
- Disrupted amino acid metabolism affecting muscle contraction and repair - and this occurred even when muscle glycogen levels (energy stores) were normal.

This is the key finding: sleep restriction doesn't just make you feel weaker. It fundamentally alters how your muscles produce energy and repair themselves, at a level that no amount of pre-workout or protein shake can fully compensate for.

The Motivation Paradox

There is one interesting nuance worth flagging. Research shows that sleep deprivation impairs strength most significantly in maximal compound movements performed without specific motivational interventions. In other words, if you're sufficiently psyched up, you may be able to partially mask the deficit. This is why athletes sometimes feel they've 'had a good session' on minimal sleep. The adrenaline and competitive drive can temporarily compensate.

But temporarily is the operative word. The underlying physiological impairment remains.

 **Sammy's Tip:** If you notice your motivation to train is high but your actual performance numbers are dropping - that's a red flag, not a green light to push harder. Check your sleep data first.

Chapter 3: Sleep Quality, Duration, and the Muscle Health Connection

Meet Diane

Real-World Story

Diane is 67 and has always been active. She plays tennis twice a week, yoga, regular walking. In her early 60s she noticed that despite maintaining her exercise routine, her muscle tone was decreasing, and her strength was fading. She was sleeping 9-10 hours a night and assumed she was recovering well. What she didn't know was that her sleep was highly fragmented she was waking multiple times, and her actual restorative sleep was far less than the hours in bed suggested. A sleep study revealed moderate obstructive sleep apnoea.

Diane's story illustrates something the research makes very clear: hours in bed and quality of sleep are not the same thing. And for muscle health, quality often matters more than quantity.

The HypnoLaus Study: The Largest Real-World Evidence

One of the most significant studies in this area is the HypnoLaus cohort study (Piovezan et al., Maturitas, 2022), which examined 1,902 adults aged 40-80 using objective sleep monitoring alongside muscle strength measurements. The findings are striking and important.

6.66x higher odds of low muscle strength in long sleepers (>8.5 hours)

Compared to 1.74x for short sleepers (<6.2 hours). Both extremes are problematic and the optimal window for most adults is 7-9 hours. (HypnoLaus, 2022)

This U-shaped relationship is one of the most important findings in recent sleep-muscle research. Both too little and too much sleep are associated with reduced muscle strength, and long sleep is the stronger signal, often indicating underlying health conditions, undiagnosed sleep disorders, or metabolic disruption.

What the Data Actually Shows

- More than 90 minutes of nighttime wakefulness, even within a longer sleep period - increased odds of low muscle strength by 1.60 times.
- Sleep efficiency below 85% in adults over 60 was associated with 1.81 times higher odds of low muscle strength.
- Severe obstructive sleep apnoea (AHI >30) was associated with 2.36 times higher odds of low muscle strength and 2.64 times in women.

These are not marginal effects. These are the kinds of numbers that should make anyone over 50 take their sleep quality seriously.

Quality Deterioration Over Time: The Long Game

A large retrospective cohort study of 19,770 participants examined what happens when sleep quality changes over time. The results were unambiguous: individuals whose sleep quality worsened, even when duration stayed the same, showed greater losses of skeletal muscle mass and greater increases in fat mass compared to those who maintained good sleep quality.

This is one of the most practical findings in this entire body of research. You don't need a dramatic sleep crisis for sleep to be eroding your physical composition. A gradual, year-on-year decline in sleep quality, the kind that happens almost imperceptibly as we age or as life gets busier, is enough.

 **Sammy's Tip:** Most modern wearables track sleep efficiency and sleep staging. If your deep sleep is trending downward or your sleep score has been consistently below 70 over several weeks, it's worth investigating.

The Sarcopenia Cycle

For older adults, there is a deeply concerning feedback loop emerging from the research. Poor sleep accelerates muscle loss (sarcopenia) through reduced protein synthesis and altered metabolism. But sarcopenia itself then contributes to sleep disorders, weakened upper airway muscles increase the risk and severity of sleep apnoea. Which further disrupts sleep. Which accelerates muscle loss further.

Breaking this cycle requires addressing sleep directly - not hoping that more exercise will compensate. And it requires knowing what your sleep actually looks like, not what you assume it does.

Chapter 4: Exercise as a Protective Strategy

Meet Jamie

Real-World Story

Jamie is a junior doctor, 29 years old, training for his first powerlifting competition while working rotating shifts. He sleeps an average of 5.5 hours on working days, sometimes less. He was convinced his training would have to go on hold during his worst rotas. It didn't. Once he understood which type of training could help protect his muscle protein synthesis even during restricted sleep.

The relationship between exercise and sleep runs in both directions. Sleep affects your training outcomes, but the type, timing, and intensity of your training can also meaningfully protect against the consequences of sleep restriction. This is one of the most hopeful and actionable findings in recent research.

High-Intensity Interval Training as a Shield (HIIE)

A landmark study by Saner et al. (Journal of Physiology, 2020) examined three groups over five nights: normal sleep, sleep restriction only, and sleep restriction with high-intensity interval exercise (HIIE). The findings are remarkable:

HIIE maintained muscle protein synthesis rates at normal-sleep levels - despite sleep restriction

Sleep restriction alone reduced myofibrillar protein synthesis by ~19%. Adding HIIE completely offset this reduction. (Saner et al., 2020)

This doesn't mean HIIE is a substitute for sleep. It absolutely isn't. But for people like Jamie, shift workers, new parents, anyone facing unavoidable sleep restriction, it means that strategic exercise selection can serve as a meaningful protective measure.

Resistance Training Improves Sleep Quality

The feedback loop works in a positive direction too. Research on adolescents undergoing 12 weeks of structured resistance training showed significant improvements in sleep quality scores, daytime sleepiness, and total sleep duration. Roughly 67% of those who trained experienced meaningful sleep improvements, compared to just 17% of controls.

This creates a genuinely virtuous cycle: better training improves sleep, which improves recovery, which improves training capacity, which improves sleep again. But you have to start somewhere, and most people underestimate how much their sleep is the limiting factor.

Training to Failure vs Not to Failure: The Sleep Verdict

For those debating whether training-to-failure protocols disrupt sleep more than stopping short of failure. Current research suggests no significant difference in sleep quality or heart rate variability between the two approaches. Both can be incorporated without specific concern about sleep disruption, though individual responses vary.

 **Sammy's Tip:** If sleep is restricted, prioritise HII or moderate-to-high intensity work earlier in the day. Avoid training within 3 hours of bedtime. And consider that a shorter, more intense session on a sleep-restricted day may serve you better than grinding through a long, low-intensity session.

Chapter 5: Age, Gender, and Why One Size Doesn't Fit All

Meet Eleanor and David



Real-World Story

Eleanor is 72, recently retired, and determined to maintain her independence and physical capacity. David is 34, a software engineer and recreational cyclist. Both have been told 'sleep more.' But the research tells us their risks, vulnerabilities, and optimal strategies are quite different, and treating them identically would be a mistake.

One of the most consistent themes in recent sleep-strength research is that vulnerability increases with age. The associations between poor sleep and low muscle strength are more pronounced in older adults, and the consequences more serious.

Why Age Amplifies Everything

- Reduced sleep efficiency shows stronger associations with low muscle strength in adults over 60 than in younger populations.
- Both short and long sleep durations have more pronounced effects on strength in older groups.
- Sleep fragmentation and nighttime wakefulness are more strongly linked to sarcopenia markers in older adults.
- The bidirectional sarcopenia-sleep apnoea cycle is primarily an older adult phenomenon, but it begins earlier than most people realise.

For Eleanor, this means sleep isn't a nice-to-have. It's a functional independence issue. The research connecting sleep quality to fall risk, grip strength, and mobility in older adults is compelling. And there is so much more to know.

Gender Differences Worth Knowing

The research reveals some important gender-specific patterns. Women with severe obstructive sleep apnoea show stronger associations with low muscle strength (2.64 times higher odds) than the overall population figure (2.36 times). Hormonal influences particularly around menopause appear to affect both sleep quality and muscle maintenance in ways that are still being fully understood.

Long sleep duration shows similar associations in both men and women, suggesting this is a universal concern. But the mechanisms may differ, with women potentially more affected by hormonal disruption to both sleep architecture and muscle metabolism.

Individual Variability: Why Your Friend Seems Fine on 5 Hours

We all know someone who appears to thrive on minimal sleep. The research confirms that individual responses to sleep restriction do genuinely vary, influenced by training status, genetics, habitual sleep patterns, and overall health. Trained individuals show some degree of protective effect compared to untrained controls.

But here's the clinical reality: almost no one performs optimally on chronically restricted sleep. They may function. They may even feel they function well. But their data, that is if they're measuring it may tell a different story.

 **Sammy's Tip:** If you're over 50 and haven't had a sleep quality assessment, I'd strongly recommend one. Undiagnosed sleep apnoea is common, often asymptomatic, and has significant implications not just for your muscle health but for your cardiovascular and cognitive health too.

Chapter 6: Practical Strategies - What to Actually Do?

The Foundations

The research gives us clear parameters. Let's translate them into practical action.

Duration: The 7-9 Hour Window

This is your target. Not 6 hours plus coffee. Not 10 hours as a chronic pattern. The evidence is consistent: 7-9 hours represents the optimal range for most adults for both sleep health and muscle health. Anything consistently below 7 hours, and the physiological consequences accumulate. Anything above 9 hours as a regular pattern warrants investigation, not celebration.

Consistency Matters as Much as Duration

Irregular sleep timing which is going to bed and waking at very different times across the week disrupts your circadian rhythm and sleep architecture even if total hours are technically adequate. Maintaining consistent sleep and wake times, including at weekends, is one of the most impactful single changes most people can make.

Your Sleep Environment

- Temperature: Cool is better. Research points to around 18°C (65°F) as the optimal bedroom temperature for sleep quality.
- Light: As dark as possible. Even low levels of light can disrupt melatonin production and sleep architecture.
- Noise: Consistent background noise (white or brown noise) can be more helpful than complete silence for many people.
- Devices: The blue light issue is real, but the stimulation of screen content is arguably more disruptive than the light itself. Both matter.

Nutrition Strategies That Are Actually Evidence-Based

Pre-sleep protein is one of the most consistently supported nutritional interventions in the sleep-strength literature. Research demonstrates that consuming 25-30 grams of slow-digesting protein, casein being the most studied 30-60 minutes before sleep enhances overnight muscle protein synthesis. This is a simple, practical strategy with good evidence behind it.

Caffeine management matters more than most people acknowledge. The half-life of caffeine is approximately 5-7 hours in most adults. A 3pm coffee contains about a quarter of its caffeine at 11pm. Cutting off caffeine by 1-2pm rather than the commonly recommended 6pm window may produce meaningfully better sleep quality, particularly in those who are caffeine-sensitive.

When Sleep Is Unavoidably Restricted

Life happens. New babies, high-pressure deadlines, shift work, illness. When sleep restriction is unavoidable, here's how to minimise the damage:

- Incorporate HIE where possible - the evidence shows it can maintain protein synthesis rates even during restricted sleep periods.
- Train earlier in the day - before accumulated wakefulness compounds performance impairment.
- Reduce training volume and prioritise intensity - quality over quantity when recovery capacity is compromised.
- Use strategic napping - 20-30 minutes in early afternoon can partially offset some of the performance deficit without disrupting nighttime sleep.
- Consider sleep banking - if you know a period of restriction is coming, extending sleep in the days beforehand provides some protection.

 **Sammy's Tip:** Sleep banking is not a myth - research does support the idea that extending sleep before anticipated restriction helps preserve performance. If you know a demanding week is coming, prioritise sleep in the days leading up to it.

Tracking: The Bridge to the Next Book

Here is where this guide becomes a launch pad. Everything I've outlined above including sleep duration, sleep efficiency, sleep quality, fragmentation, deep sleep proportion, can now be measured. Not in a sleep laboratory. On your wrist.

Modern wearables give us access to data that was previously only available to elite sports scientists working with professional athletes. Wearables measure sleep staging with remarkable accuracy. Some devices track HRV, respiratory rate, skin temperature, and recovery scores alongside sleep metrics.

The question is no longer whether you can access this data. The question is: are you using it? Do you understand what it means? Do you know how to adjust your training, nutrition, and recovery strategies based on what the numbers are telling you?

That is exactly what The Good Sleep Guide for Health Tech will explore. This book is the science. The next is the application. Together, they give you everything you need to stop guessing and start optimising.

Chapter 7: Clinical Implications and What Comes Next ?

Why This Matters Beyond the Gym

Everything in this book has implications that extend well beyond athletic performance. The relationship between sleep and muscle health is one of the most significant and under-discussed public health issues of our time.

Sarcopenia affects quality of life, independence, fall risk, and mortality in older adults. If we can demonstrate that sleep interventions meaningfully slow or reverse muscle loss, and the early evidence suggests we can, this has enormous implications for how we approach ageing, rehabilitation, and preventive healthcare.

Screening for sleep disorders should be part of geriatric assessments and musculoskeletal evaluations. CPAP therapy for moderate-to-severe OSA, for example, may do more to preserve muscle function in an older patient than many standard physiotherapy interventions alone.

What We Still Don't Know

The science is strong but incomplete. Some of the most important questions are still being answered:

- What are the precise molecular mechanisms linking sleep disruption to impaired protein synthesis? We know it happens, yet we don't yet fully know exactly how.
- How do different sleep stages contribute differently to muscle recovery? Deep sleep and REM sleep clearly serve different restorative functions, the specifics are still being mapped.
- Can improving sleep reverse sarcopenia in older adults, or only slow its progression? The intervention trials needed to answer this definitively are underway.
- What are the optimal timing, intensity, and types of exercise for mitigating sleep restriction effects across different populations?

These are not academic questions. They are the questions that will shape how physiotherapists, trainers, sports scientists, and clinicians work with their patients and clients over the next decade.

The Role of Technology

And this is where the data becomes crucial. The wearable revolution isn't just about consumer gadgetry. It's about democratising access to physiological monitoring that was previously only available in research settings. When millions of people are collecting objective sleep data, the research possibilities expand enormously.

We are at the beginning of an era in which the gap between population-level research and individual insight collapses. Your sleep data isn't just informative for you. Aggregated appropriately, it becomes part of the evidence base that helps us understand sleep-health relationships at a scale never previously possible.

Conclusion: Your Strongest Self Is Built While You Sleep

Let me bring this back to where we started.

Sarah, the marketing director stuck at the same squat weight for months. Marcus, the powerlifter whose lifts dropped during a high-stress period. Diane, whose sleep apnoea was silently stealing her strength. Jamie, the junior doctor who thought training through his worst rotas was impossible. Eleanor, determined to maintain her independence into her 70s and beyond.

Every one of them had something in common: their sleep was the missing variable. And in every case, addressing sleep, understanding it, measuring it, and actively optimising it, was what unlocked progress.

The evidence is clear:

- Sleep deprivation impairs muscle protein synthesis the very process by which training produces results.
- Both too little and too much sleep is associated with reduced muscle strength. Aim for 7-9 hours.
- Sleep quality matters as much as quantity. Fragmented, inefficient sleep undermines muscle health even when hours look adequate.
- High-intensity interval exercise can help preserve protein synthesis during unavoidable sleep restriction.
- Resistance training improves sleep quality creating the virtuous cycle every athlete wants.
- Older adults are particularly vulnerable and the sarcopenia-sleep apnoea cycle is one of the most important and under-addressed health challenges in ageing.
- If you can measure it, you can change it and now, you can measure more than ever before.

Treat your sleep with the same seriousness you give your training programme. Track it. Optimise it. Address the problems you find. And know that every good night of sleep isn't wasted time, it's the hours when the work you put in at the gym actually becomes strength.

Your strongest self is built while you sleep.

Make it count.

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This guide is for educational purposes and does not replace individual clinical or medical advice

About Sammy Margo

Sammy Margo MSc MCSP HCPC MMACP AACP is a Chartered Physiotherapist with over 35 years of clinical experience. She is the CEO and Founder of SMARTPHYSIO, a multi-award-winning private physiotherapy practice with four London clinic locations. She was the first female Chartered Physiotherapist in English professional football and specialises in Care of the Older Adult.

Sammy is the author of *The Good Sleep Guide* and *The Good Sleep Guide for Kids* (Penguin/Ebury) and has been a CSP Media Spokesperson for over 17 years. She is a competitive bodybuilder, keynote speaker, Trustee of Age UK Camden, and a passionate advocate for the role of sleep in physical and cognitive performance.

The Good Sleep Guide for Health Tech exploring how wearable technology can be used to measure, understand, and optimise sleep for performance is coming soon.



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