

Sleep quality & well being

Getting a good night's sleep is a vital factor in taking care of our mental and physical health.

Everyone can relate to the benefits of sleeping well, it leaves us feeling more energetic and alert and boosts concentration so that we can better perform at work and complete daily tasks.

Sleep Cycle

There are two types of sleep – REM and NREM sleep.

NREM (75% of the night) is where the 'deep sleep' occurs. This is the good quality sleep that makes us feel awake and refreshed. Deep sleep generally takes place during the first 5 hours after falling asleep. During this time our blood pressure drops, muscles are relaxed, and tissue growth and repairs occur.

REM (25% of the night) first occurs about 90 minutes after falling asleep and reoccurs every 90 minutes getting longer later into the night. REM sleep provides energy to the brain and body, supports daytime performance, a time where our brain is active, and dreams occur.

Sleep is a crucial time for our body to complete important biological functions. Sleeping allows our body to maintain physical recovery and repair, brain development, cardiac function and body metabolism. Cognitively, sleep is vital in supporting our learning, improving memory and sustain our overall mood.

Our sleep can often be disrupted by multiple factors, such as illness, pain, stress or anxiety and depression.

How much sleep do we need?

Sleep requirements vary from person to person – everyone is different! Majority of healthy adults require between 7.5-9hrs per night to function at their best.

It is important to focus more on how you feel following a night's sleep, rather than the specific number of hours you spend asleep. Quality is as important as quantity.

Disrupted sleep patterns

Up to half of the population will experience problems getting to sleep, or poor-quality sleep during their lifetime.

Example of a disrupted sleep pattern:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Poor quality sleep
- Frequently waking during the night
- Waking very early in the morning and being unable to get back to sleep.

Consequences of disrupted sleep patterns

Sleep disorders are major disturbances of normal sleep patterns that lead to distress and disrupt our ability to function in daily life. Not only are sleep disorders extremely common but issues and disruptions to sleep can have a profound impact on your daily functioning and wellbeing.

- Fatigue and tiredness throughout the day
- Impaired memory and decreased concentration
- Emotional instability and irritability
- Increased anxiety
- Headaches and body pains
- Weakened immune system
- Poor mental health

Consequences of disrupted sleep patterns

Good sleep habits have been linked to mood improvements, better concentration and boosted performance at school or work.

Poor sleep has a connection with symptoms of depression, such as feeling low, hopeless, unmotivated, irritable, thoughts of self-harm and using alcohol and drugs.

There is a link between poor mental health and poor sleep. Chronic sleep disturbances, like insomnia, is a symptom of depression and a risk factor for developing depression and anxiety. The risk of developing a mental health condition increases by up to 10 times for people who experience insomnia.



Tips for improving quality and duration of sleep



Waking Up

Avoid hitting the snooze button. Get out of bed as soon as you wake up in the morning, try not to drift back to sleep.

Maintain a regular bedtime. Get up around the same time every day. Having a regular bedtime will adjust your body to a schedule and make it easier to fall asleep.

Physical activity and fresh air. Go outside and get some fresh air to wake yourself up, consider doing some physical exercise.



During the day

Stay active. Engage in a form of physical activity for a minimum of 30 minutes a day.

Avoid naps. Although napping may make you feel better in the short term, it is not a substitute for the deep sleep you have at night.

Minimise caffeine intake. Be mindful of your caffeine intake and avoid after 4.00pm.

Avoid excessive alcohol consumption. Drinking may help you to relax, but excessive alcohol makes it harder to stay asleep and it provides lower quality sleep. Avoid smoking after 6.00pm to allow the stimulants to clear your system.

Manage stress levels. Attempt to address stressful issues during the day rather than just before bed.



Bedtime

Develop a bedtime routine. Take time to wind down, read a book, have a bath or listen to soft music. Avoid going to bed hungry or with a full bladder.

Avoid electronic devices. Minimise your use of electronic devices within 30 minutes of your bedtime.

Don't go to bed too early. Avoid getting into bed too early as your body won't be ready for deep sleep.

Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and well ventilated. Consider using ear plugs if you have a partner who snores or loud neighbours. This is particularly important if you are a shift worker and have to sleep when the sun is up.

For some people, sleep issues can persist over months or years. Overtime it is possible that people may feel anxious about the prospect of going to bed each night. This anxiety can often make it harder to fall asleep.

Beyond Blue¹ recommends the following routine if you are experiencing difficulties falling asleep

- If you are having trouble falling asleep after 30 minutes, get up.
- Distract yourself from worries or restlessness by doing a quiet activity such as playing cards, knitting or taking a warm bath. If your mind is very active or you can't stop worrying, try something that requires more concentration, such as crosswords, puzzles or reading. You can also try some meditation or relaxation breathing techniques.
- Go back to bed when you feel more relaxed and tired. If you're still awake after 30 minutes, get up again, repeat the process until you fall asleep after returning to bed.

¹ "Sleeping Well.", *Beyond Blue*,

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/staying-well/sleeping-well>.

If you are worried about an aspect of your sleep or feel your daily functioning and wellbeing is impacted, please reach out to a mental health clinician or contact your GP to discuss.

To arrange an appointment please call us on

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