



## Sleep



Sleep is fundamental for both physical and psychological wellbeing, and is crucial for learning. It restores body and mind, keeps us alert, and helps consolidate our learning. When we don't sleep well, we are more prone to errors, impaired concentration and poor decision making, reduced emotional resilience (feeling irritable or moody) and often, reduced motivation.

Sleep is a complex behaviour, and sleep disruption isn't always caused by just one thing. Many factors, including our physical health, psychological wellbeing, diet, habits and environment, or a combination of these, can affect the quality of our sleep and develop into bad habits.

Sleep can be impaired in different ways. You could be having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. You might be waking frequently during the night, waking up too early or too late, waking up feeling unrefreshed, or you might have an irregular sleep/wake cycle.

Just knowing that we need good sleep is not a guarantee of a good night's sleep, and paradoxically, stressing about sleep is a very common cause of sleep problems.

Improving your sleep usually involves a few changes across your life. Below are some tips to help you understand factors that can affect sleep, as well as what you can do about it.

### **Routine: human bodies LOVE routine**

We all have an internal clock that governs the rhythms of our body, and this syncs with a regular sleep routine. We can work with our natural rhythm by:

- Getting up the same time every day. If you want to make changes, this is a great place to start. We can force ourselves to wake, but we can't force ourselves to sleep, so don't try to go to bed if you're not tired. Use external triggers to make yourself wake up, such as alarms on the other side of the room or enlisting the help of people who can wake you up.
- Learning your 'tired signs' (heavy eyes, foggy brain etc.) and listening to your body – go to bed at night when it's giving you the signs.
- Getting some sunshine first thing in the morning to 'reset' your clock - even just opening the curtains.
- Not napping – our brains get confused.: "Why am I trying to sleep again when I just napped five hours ago?" Take note if you tend to 'accidentally' nap (such as in a comfy chair after lunch) and avoid situations where that may happen.



### Create an environment that supports sleep

- Make it comfortable – think about temperature, a supportive mattress and comfy bedding.
- Minimise distractions such as light and noise. If necessary, consider earplugs or a sleep mask.
- Try not to use your bedroom or bed for anything other than sleep and intimacy. Train your brain to associate bed with sleep. If you go to bed and you don't fall asleep within a reasonable amount of time, get up, do something relaxing, then go back to bed when you feel sleepy.
- Avoid TV, computer, tablet or smartphone screens right before sleep (the light disrupts the sleep cycle). Aim to switch them off at least 30 minutes before sleep.
- Avoid studying right before bed – it wakes the brain up just as you're trying to shut it down. Put the books away 30-60 minutes before bed and do something relaxing to signal to your brain that you're in 'shut-down mode'.

### Care of mind and body to support sleep

- Good physical wellbeing supports good sleep. Aim for regular movement, a nutritious diet, and regular relaxation.

- Avoid exercise right before bed – it elevates body temperature, which is opposite to the decline in body temperature naturally associated with sleep.
- Avoid natural or chemical stimulants before bed. They can disrupt the body's ability to move into the sleep phases. Listen to your body and learn your limits (no coffee after 2pm, no cigarettes after 10pm, for example).
- Notice if stress is affecting your sleep (either general stress, or stress about sleeping). A chatty mind or an anxious body are common causes of sleep disruption. Review stress management strategies such as writing your worries in a journal, mindful breathing, or relaxation techniques that may help quieten the 'chatter' (see Managing Stress tip sheet).
- Seek professional advice if you think there is a biological or psychological reason for your sleep difficulties.

### Prioritise

- Decide how important sleep is to you. If it's important, then commit to prioritising actions that support good sleep habits. Remember, habits form over time, so you may need to persist for a few weeks to reset your sleep habits.
- Remind yourself why it's worth it.

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### Helpful resources:

- [Sleep](#)
- [Sleep Deprivation](#)
- [Sleep Hygiene](#)