



SLEEP

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Sleep is essential for restoring physical and mental health. Most people need about 8 hours per night

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A lack of sleep can cause fatigue, poor concentration, impaired judgement and slow reaction time

3

Shift workers often get less sleep. Establishing a routine and minimising noise and light can help achieve solid sleep



What is sleep?

Sleep is an essential function for restoring us physically and mentally. It is an active state, and some parts of the brain use more oxygen and glucose when we are sleeping than when we are awake.

During the sleep cycle we alternate rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep. NREM makes up about 75% of our sleeping time and is where much of our growth and repair occurs.

The majority of our dreams are during the REM phase, which occurs about every 90-120 minutes.

How much sleep do we need?

The average adult requires 8 hours of sleep per night, but this varies with age, lifestyle, personality and environment.

A lack of sleep can cause:

- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Impaired memory
- Impaired judgement
- Impaired physical coordination
- Negative mood
- Slowed reaction time

Our body cues us to sleep using an internal body clock, or circadian rhythm, which responds to changes in light and dark.

At night we release melatonin, a hormone which causes the "sleepy" feeling. Then, as light increases in the morning, this triggers the body to wake.

Another driver of our need to sleep is the duration of time for which we have been awake, i.e the longer it's been since we last slept, the stronger the drive to sleep.

How can I maximise my quality of sleep?

1. **Establish a regular sleep pattern**
Aim to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends.
2. **Create a sleep sanctuary**
Minimise light, maintain a comfortable room temperature, wear light clothing and ensure the bed is comfortable.
3. **Improve your lifestyle**
Regular activity, a balanced diet and no smoking.
4. **Wind down before bed**
Avoid large meals, alcohol, caffeine or strenuous physical activity 2 hours before bed.
5. **Have a routine**
Relaxing pre-bed rituals like having a bath or reading a book can help.

I'm a shift worker - how can I sleep enough?

People who work night shift sleep on average 1hr less per night, and continue to feel tired on days off. Some tips for improving sleep are:

- Make time for sufficient sleep. This may mean moving social activities around.
- Aim to maintain a regular sleep pattern. This is easier when your shifts are consistent.
- Create a quiet environment. Avoid having your phone in your room, and use earplugs, a fan or white noise machine.
- Keep the room cool and dark. Heavy curtains help to block out light.
- Avoid caffeine, sleeping pills, alcohol and cigarettes before bed.
- Aim to sleep just before work, rather than earlier in the day, or have a nap just before work.

Resources for better sleep:

1. Sleep Health A-Z Guide. Sleep Health Foundation. www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au
2. Sleep. Better Health Channel. www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

