

GETTING THE SLEEP YOU NEED



A good night's sleep is important for maintaining good health. Sleeping problems are common and can leave you feeling irritable and without energy. If this goes on for too long, you may end up feeling anxious or depressed. But there are a number of things you can do to improve your sleep so your mind and body can recharge from the day's activities.

HOW MUCH SLEEP DO WE NEED?

Sleep is important for all of us, to help our bodies recover and recharge. Being alert and active during the day helps us to get a good night's sleep. It's also important to get into regular patterns of sleep and physical activity.

Most people need between five to nine hours sleep a night but, when it comes down to it, it's not the total

length of sleep that really matters. It's how good the sleep is for your body and whether you're getting what the doctors call 'deep sleep' or 'dream sleep'. Deep sleep usually occurs during the first five hours of the night. So if you only sleep four or five hours, you'll get as much deep sleep as someone who's sleeping for eight to ten hours. Over the life cycle, it's normal for us to sleep less, and our sleep becomes more broken by brief awakenings.

Problems getting to sleep, waking early or not being able to sleep throughout the night can affect your general well-being. As well as feeling tired, you may feel irritable, have no energy and find it hard to concentrate or to remember things. This can lead to other problems such as difficulty with schoolwork. You may also find you get sick more easily, have aches or pains or have difficulty recovering from depression.

If you continually feel tired all the time, are spending more time in bed, sleeping badly or for less time, napping during the day or have cut down on physical activities, you're probably not getting enough sleep.

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP

When you wake up in the morning:

- get out of bed; don't try to go back to sleep
- try to get up at about the same time each morning, perhaps around 7am to 7.30am
- go outside into the fresh air and do something active.

During the day:

- don't nap
- if you're worrying about things during the night, set aside some time for problem-solving during the day
- try to be physically active
- avoid caffeine drinks (like coffee, strong tea, cola or energy drinks) after 4pm and try not to have more than two cups of these drinks each day.

Before going to bed:

- avoid going to bed too early and try to go at a regular time, say 10pm to 10.30pm
- make sure you are not hungry and have been to the toilet
- avoid drinking alcohol or smoking
- allow yourself time to wind down – if you are working or studying, stop at least 30 minutes before bedtime and do something relaxing (e.g. have a warm shower or bath).

While you sleep:

- try to make your bedroom quiet, dim and cool
- avoid too many blankets and electric blankets.

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beyondblue: the national depression initiative



WHAT CAUSES SLEEP PROBLEMS?

There are lots of things that can cause sleeping problems. Some of these are temporary like the effects of medications (such as pain and cold relievers), stimulants (such as coffee or tobacco), excitement or jet lag. Others, like illness, pain or stress, can last for longer periods of time and change sleeping patterns.

Usually a more regular sleeping pattern returns as the illness or the stressful situation passes. But if this doesn't happen, it can lead to worry about getting to sleep, which makes the problem even worse and creates a vicious cycle. Continuing tiredness and low energy levels can also contribute to the development of depression.

Depression can also be a cause of sleeping problems. Some of the sleeping problems that are common with depression are trouble getting to sleep, poor quality sleep, less sleep, waking often during the night or waking very early in the morning and being unable to get back to sleep.

SOLVING LONG-TERM SLEEP PROBLEMS

For some people, sleeping problems may last for weeks, months or even years. Here are some steps that can help you to break the cycle of feeling anxious and restless in bed.

1. Eliminate the things that may be stopping you from sleeping such as alcohol or coffee (see above).
2. Get up if you can't sleep after trying for 15 to 20 minutes. Staying in bed when you're feeling restless and anxious is unlikely to result in sleep.
3. Do something quiet and distracting, for example play cards, read, knit or have a warm bath. If your mind is very active or you can't stop worrying, it may be helpful to concentrate on something else, such as doing a crossword or Sudoku puzzle, or watching television. However, choose something boring to do, not stimulating. By distracting yourself from your worries, you may find it easier to wind down and become sleepy.
4. Go back to bed when you feel more relaxed and sleepy.
5. If you're still awake after a further 15 to 20 minutes, get out of bed again. Repeat this process until you fall asleep shortly after returning to bed.



KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Going to bed at the same time each night and getting up at the same time each morning can help your body clock get into rhythm and make sleeping feel more natural.
- If you have a lot of things on your mind, try to process the day's thoughts and feelings and let go of them before you go to bed. If it helps, write things down during the day or talk about them with someone you trust.
- If you've been feeling down for a couple of weeks and also been unable to sleep, it may be a good idea to talk to a family friend, counsellor or doctor about how you are feeling.



LOOK

for the signs of depression



TALK

about what's going on



LISTEN

to your friends' experiences



SEEK HELP

together!

MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

Lifeline 13 11 14 (cost of a local call)

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

beyondblue www.youthbeyondblue.com or www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

headspace www.headspace.org.au
Information, support and help near you

ReachOut.com www.reachout.com
Information and support for young people going through tough times

The websites below can help you to find health services in your area. They list services that are either free of charge or low cost:

Kids Help Line www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline Service Finder
www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder

If you or a friend want to communicate with someone via email or online, Kids Help Line offers confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

SOURCES This fact sheet is based on the following sources:

- ReachOut.com www.reachout.com
- beyondblue www.youthbeyondblue.com and www.beyondblue.org.au

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