

Sleep hygiene

When was the last time you had a good night's sleep?

The average person needs to have around eight hours of sleep a day, give or take, depending on the individual. You should be aiming for seven to nine hours of unbroken sleep to help you provide support and care to others.

Many people are not aware of how their sleeping patterns affect how they feel each day. If you are having good quality sleep you will wake up ready for the day ahead and you will be better able to:

- Problem solve and cope with challenges
- Get along better with the people around you
- Manage your emotions
- Feel physically and mentally more alert and less likely to make mistakes or have accidents.

When we sleep, we do more than just physically rest. It's also the time when our brain repairs our bodies, stores memories, and flushes out toxins. Good sleep can give us an overall better sense of health and wellbeing. It makes us less likely to get sick and improves mood, metabolism and our ability to cope with pain.

Tips for a healthy sleep routine

Keep it consistent: Try to go to bed and get up at roughly the same time every day of the week. According to sleep experts, you should avoid sleeping in, even if you have had a poor night's sleep. Consistency in your sleeping pattern will keep your internal clock regulated. Your internal clock tells your body when to sleep, rise and eat, and also controls body temperature, blood pressure and the daily release of hormones.

Set the right bedroom conditions and turn off your screens: A good sleep environment is dark, comfortable, quiet and slightly cool. Watching television or using your computer or mobile phone in bed should be avoided. Research has shown that screen time before bed suppresses melatonin, the hormone that helps control your sleep and wake cycles. It can also prolong the time it takes to fall asleep and reduce how alert you are the following morning.

Diet and exercise: Try not to eat too close to your bed time. A full stomach can make it difficult to fall asleep. If you are feeling hungry, eat something small and light. Caffeine (tea, coffee and caffeinated soft drinks) and nicotine (cigarettes) and other such stimulants can keep you awake at night. Also try to avoid alcohol as although it may make you drowsy, it can disrupt your sleep. Regular exercise can help you improve your sleep. However, try not to do strenuous exercise too close to bedtime, instead consider lower-intensity workouts, such as yoga or stretches.

Relaxation is key: If you're having trouble winding down, try some relaxing activities such as reading a book, taking a bath, or perhaps some breathing exercises or meditation. If you find yourself worrying or having stressful thoughts when it's time to sleep, try to set aside some time before bedtime where you can reflect on and manage your concerns. You might like to make a to-do list or just jot down your ideas and thoughts so that they can be put aside until the next day.

Take sleep more seriously: You may feel like sleeping is less important than other activities in your life, but did you know, staying awake for up to 16 hours can have the same impact on your performance as a blood alcohol level of 0.05? After 24 hours that will increase to 0.1 and could increase your risk of an accident or injury.

More information

For some related information and tips, check out the [staying active and eating well fact sheet](#).