



## SLEEP WELL FOR GOOD HEALTH

*Did you know that your daytime habits can have an impact on your quality of sleep and how alert you are the following day? 'Sleep hygiene' refers to a number of practices you can adopt to ensure a better night's sleep.*

Everyone needs to get a good night's sleep for optimum health. Sleep is vital for growth, healing and rejuvenation of the body and gives the brain a chance to process, collect and store information.

New research suggests that the brain also cleans out toxins during sleep, a process it cannot do while we are awake.

Lack of sleep impacts on your concentration, memory and productivity the following day. It also has a direct impact on mood and can leave you feeling cranky, anxious, unproductive and less likely to cope with daily stress. Over the long term, too little sleep can have a negative effect on your immune system and is a risk factor for high blood pressure, the development of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

If you are regularly getting one to two hours less sleep per night than your body needs, you start to incur a 'sleep debt' – sleep deprivation that causes many of the symptoms noted above.

Sleep is measured in both quantity and quality – how much sleep you get and how fitful or restless your sleep is. If you regularly work late, have insomnia or struggle to stay asleep at night you are probably not getting the sleep you need.

### **Dos and don'ts for good sleep hygiene**

With more rest you can look forward to improved concentration, better productivity and improved mood.

✔ **Create a comfortable sleep space**  
Your bedroom should be for sleep and sex only. It shouldn't be an extension of your TV lounge or be used as an office. The room should be a comfortable temperature. If outdoor lighting shines into your room, consider replacing thin curtains with block-out drapes or blinds.

✔ **Check your mattress and bedding**  
Your mattress should provide comfort and support. If yours is older than seven years, consider a new one. Bedding should be light and comfortable. In winter, use several layers as opposed to heavy duvets and blankets.

✔ **Keep a sleep routine**  
Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. In the run-up to bedtime, read quietly or listen to gentle music to prepare your body for sleep. Follow this schedule over weekends and during holidays, not just on weekdays.

⊗ **Don't eat dinner too late**  
Aim to eat around two to three hours before bed. Avoid heavy, spicy dishes or other foods

that give you heartburn or indigestion. If you feel peckish, choose a light snack such as low-fat cottage cheese or tuna on a cracker, a handful of nuts or a little peanut butter.

⊗ **Avoid stimulants and alcohol near bedtime**  
Alcohol, carbonated and caffeinated drinks like coffee and tea are best avoided about four to six hours before bed. Nicotine and tobacco products can also have a negative impact on sleep, so don't smoke close to bed time or better yet, kick the habit.

✔ **Nap wisely**  
A short 20 to 30 minute power nap can give you a boost for the afternoon. If you do take a nap, opt for around midday to mid-afternoon but never after 4pm.

✔ **Monitor fluids**  
Reduce your fluid intake about two hours before bed to reduce the number of bathroom trips you have to make during the night.

⊗ **Don't exercise too late**  
Daily exercise can help improve your quality of sleep, but if you struggle to sleep and follow a strenuous workout programme in the afternoons or evenings, consider swapping this for a morning session.

✔ **Turn off electronic devices**

Switch off or put aside your cellphone, tablet or computer about 90 minutes before bedtime.

✔ **Practice the 20-minute rule**

If you don't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and find a restful activity to do. Don't surf the internet, check Facebook, catch up on work or watch TV as these activities will stimulate your mind.

✔ **Get a handle on stress**

During periods of high stress, you may find that you wake up during the night with racing thoughts and anxiety. Keep a notepad next to your bed and write down your concerns, then try to go back to sleep. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can help to redirect your thoughts away from problems. The 20-minute rule applies here too. Get out of bed and do a quiet activity to take your mind off things. If you feel sleepy, head back to bed.

✔ **Change sleep arrangements**

Sharing your bed with a restless pet or older child who tosses and turns can have a negative impact on your sleep. Let pets sleep in a basket on the floor and consider moving toddlers and older kids to their own bedrooms.



# Question corner



**Do you sleep for eight hours but rarely feel rested when you wake up?**



*If you sleep for long enough, but don't wake up feeling rested, your quality of sleep may be compromised. Medical, psychological or environmental factors can have a big impact on quality of sleep. Medical conditions like sleep apnoea, restless leg syndrome, an overactive bladder, high stress levels and mental distress can seriously disturb sleep. Insomnia may also be a side-effect of certain medications. Environmental factors are those external factors that can disturb your sleep. These include too much light or poor ventilation in the room or an uncomfortable mattress. Make a few changes to your sleep routine and environment but if you don't feel rested, make an appointment to see your doctor for a full examination.*

## How much sleep do you need?



Babies – newborn and infant

**12 to 17 hours**



Toddlers

▶ **11 to 14 hours**



Pre-schoolers

▶ **10 to 13 hours**



Primary school children

▶ **9 to 11 hours**



Teenagers

**8 to 10 hours**



Adults (18-64)

▶ **7 to 9 hours**



Seniors (65+)

▶ **7 to 8 hours**



Resource:  
*Recommendations from the National Sleep Foundation*