



Sleep your way to better health

The importance of sleep cannot be over-emphasised. A good night's sleep is important for overall health and wellbeing and necessary for a positive attitude towards each day. However, there's more to a healthy sleeping pattern than just getting enough sleep at night.

Does poor sleep really harm our health? Unhealthy sleep patterns include:

- Not sleeping for long enough (less than seven hours per night for adults)
- Sleeping for too long (more than nine hours per night for adults)
- Snoring
- Insomnia

There are five stages of shut eye that help to regulate our mental and physical wellness. Having a good sleep helps to support the bodies' natural functions. The five main stages of sleep are beneficial for the body for various reasons, including improving its immune system, processing emotions and knowledge, consolidating memories and balancing blood sugar levels.

5 Stages of Sleep:

Stage 1 and 2: Light Sleep

You begin to relax and drift into a deeper sleep, with slower breathing and a slower heart rate.

Stage 3 and 4: Deep Sleep

You become the most relaxed during this state and are therefore the most difficult to wake up.

Stage 5: REM Sleep

Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is another light sleeping stage, where dreaming occurs.

**Out of these five stages, numbers 4 and 5 are considered the most important, as these are the healing phases, where growth and repair occur.*

Did you know?

- People with disrupted sleep patterns are more at risk of depression
- The ideal amount of sleep for an adult is 7-8 hours per night
- Even one night of adequate sleep can improve cognition

Benefits of getting proper sleep:

- Better productivity and concentration
- Stronger immune system
- Lower risk of heart disease
- Improved physical performance
- Reduced risk of weight gain
- Better mood regulation

5 sleep tips and tricks to try:

1. Commit to physical activity

Movement throughout the day can lead to better sleep at night. No matter what your exercise of choice, avoid trying to cram it in one hour before bedtime, as the raised heart rate and rush of adrenalin could keep you up. Interestingly, incorporating stretching and meditative movement (such as yoga) elicits a calming response. This type of movement floods the body with calming hormones and psychological reactions that quieten the nervous system and often give you a better night's sleep.

2. Make your evening routine intentional

Start your night-time routine by changing after work into casual clothes (or even pyjamas). This signals to your body that sleep is not far behind. From there, avoid technology at the (dinner) table, so that you can have quality time with loved ones, plus start to unwind properly from your day. As a relaxation technique, you can try some mindfulness and meditation (there are lots of apps to download), then try to leave your phone till morning.

3. Consider journaling

After a stressed or packed day, we all want to veg out. With this in mind, getting into the habit of journaling every morning, as you wake up, will help you to set your intentions for the day and identify any ongoing stressors. Start by listing three things you want to achieve in the day. From there, dive into three things that are bothering you or making you feel under pressure – and why. This will help you to understand what you're trying to numb out, plus it will give you a healthy and productive daily outlet to cope with stress.

4. Keep sleep times consistent

Try to limit the difference in your sleep schedule on weeknights and weekends to no more than one hour, where possible. By creating habits and cues that promote sleep, your body gets used to falling asleep quickly and staying asleep through the night. The more a certain sleep routine is repeated and reinforced, the more stable the sleep patterns will become over time.

5. Pay attention to what you eat and drink

Don't go to bed hungry or stuffed. In particular, avoid heavy or large meals within a couple of hours of bedtime, as your discomfort might keep you up. Also, dial back on caffeine and alcohol as much as possible. Lastly, try to incorporate ingredients into your evening meal that promote good sleep such as rice, fatty fish and nuts (particularly walnuts and almonds). Even simply drinking chamomile tea or warm milk after supper may help you to sleep better.

"If you're really struggling to sleep at night, make sure you book an appointment with your doctor. They will be able to rule out if there is a physical problem you are unaware of, or simply help you to create better sleep patterns going forward. As one of the key pillars that benefits your overall health, it's imperative that you make your sleep a priority."

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