Sleep Well for Better Health

Sleep is a very important part of our wellbeing – it impacts almost every system in our bodies.

There is no other state of wakefulness that provides us with the same benefits that sleep does!

Impact of Good Quality Sleep

Our sleep impacts both our physical and mental health! Here's how:

During sleep, our body and mind are re-charged, leaving us fresh and alert when we wake up. For children and teenagers, sleep is particularly important for growth and development. A lack of sleep can lead to higher risks of physical or mental health issues.

Results of a good quality and uninterrupted sleep routine

Waking up feeling refreshed and ready for the day

Better overall mood and emotion management

Better brain function and memory

Better stress management

Getting along better with other people

Muscle recovery and tissue repair

Maintaining a healthy weight

Lower risk of heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure

Stronger immune system –less likely to get sick

A longer, healthier life and functioning body

What happens when we sleep?

We have an internal body clock that controls our sleep cycle, and impacts when we feel refreshed and alert, or tired and ready for bed. This operates on a 24-hour cycle called a **circadian rhythm,** keeping the body healthy by making sure that all its processes are co-ordinated throughout the day.

How much is enough sleep?

In reality, people vary greatly in their need for sleep, as this depends on a number of factors as mentioned above. Therefore, there is no set rule, as long as we get **good quality sleep on a regular schedule.**

... however, research has found that getting less than 7 hours of sleep is linked with poorer mental and physical health in adults. People who regularly get less than 7 hours of sleep are more likely to gain weight, be less productive, get into an accident, or suffer from chronic disease such as diabetes, hypertension, or depression.

Children and youths tend to need more hours of sleep than adults.

Signs that you may not be getting the sleep that you need.

Waking up feeling like you still need more sleep.

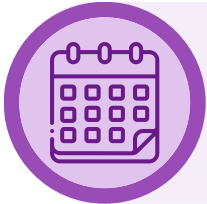Difficulties with memory or concentration

Slower reaction times

Increased stress, irritability, or low moods

What can get in the way of good sleep?

Various factors can interfere with our ability to get quality sleep. Understanding these can help us take steps to improve our sleep habits.

Overloaded Schedules
A packed daily schedule with little downtime can make it hard to transition into a relaxed state before bed.

Technology and Screen Time
Scrolling through social media or using devices before bed exposes the brain to blue light, making it harder to fall asleep.

Engaging Content
Watching exciting videos, reading the news, or engaging in online discussions can make it harder to wind down.

Stress, Anxiety and Low Mood
Worrying about daily life, feeling anxious, or experiencing sadness can make it difficult to relax and fall asleep.

Chronic Pain
Ongoing pain from conditions like arthritis can make it difficult to find a comfortable sleeping position.

Other potential barriers to good sleep

Noisy or unstable environments

Taking care of young children or other family

Heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol

Exercising too close to bed-time

Tips for Better Sleep

'Sleep Hygiene' is about putting ourselves in the best position to sleep well on a regular schedule. It involves making changes to our daily routines to make sure that we are feeling well-rested and energised!

Set and stick to a sleep schedule

Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day, including weekends, if possible! Say 'no' to skipping sleep to work, study, or socialise.

Cultivate pro-sleep habits

Don't rush into your routine as you wake up, and expose yourself to daylight as early as you can. Meanwhile, avoid harsh lights, exercise, heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol as you get closer to bedtime.

Perfect your sleeping environment

Keep your bed and sleeping environment comfortable and inviting, dim the lights when it's time to sleep, and control noise and temperature levels.

Create a nightly bedtime routine to wind down

Your routine can include personal hygiene, self-care, listening to music or podcasts, using relaxation techniques, or reading… but try to avoid digital devices during this time.

Monitor your sleep duration and quality

Take note of how long and well you sleep, as well as your exercise, mood, diet, caffeine, alcohol or medications to learn more about how your habits affect your sleep and health.

If you find that you cannot sleep, do not stay in bed for hours. Instead, get up for a bit, and try to do an activity before returning to bed again. This will help to keep your sleeping space only for sleeping!

Relaxation Exercises to Help You Sleep

Relaxation techniques can help to signal to your body that it is time to rest, and can shift attention from racing thoughts, making it easier to drift off naturally. The key is to find out which exercises work best for your, and to practice consistently.

Here are some effective ways to relax before sleeping:

Controlled Breathing

Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.

Inhale slowly and deeply, directing your breath into your belly, feeling the hand on your stomach rise.

Exhale gently, allowing the hand on your stomach to lower as you release tension with each breath.

Repeat this process until you feel relaxed enough to sleep or move on to another technique.

Controlled breathing helps to activate the body's relaxation response, slowing the heart rate and reducing stress.

Try the 4–7–8 Technique

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds
- hold your breath for 7 seconds
- breathe out through your mouth for 8 seconds

Body Scan Meditation

Lie on your back in your bed, with your face up and with your arms at your sides.

Take a few moments to practice slow, controlled breathing.

Shift your attention to your feet, simply noticing any sensations without labeling them as 'good' or 'bad'.

Inhale deeply, imagining your breath reaching all the way down to your feet.

As you exhale, allow your feet to fall away from your awareness, and then shift your focus to your ankles.

Repeat this process upward until your reach your head, allowing each area to dissolve with each breath.

By focusing on physical sensations without judgment, you can release tension and quiet the mind. You may notice areas of tightness or discomfort gradually dissolving, allowing you to ease into a state of relaxation and prepare for restful sleep.

The next exercise builds on this by actively tensing and releasing different muscle groups, further easing tension and signaling to your body that it is time to rest.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Sit or lie in a comfortable position and become aware of your breath.

As you slowly breathe in, clench your fists, noticing sensations that accompany tightening muscles.

Gently exhale, relaxing your hands. Notice tension draining out of your muscles.

Repeat this process, tensing as you inhale and releasing as you exhale, for muscle groups throughout your body.

Imagery

Sit or lie in a comfortable position and close your eyes, practicing controlled breathing.

As you slowly breathe in, clench your fists, noticing sensations that accompany tightening muscles.

Imagine yourself in a scene that feels calming and relaxing, such as a beach.

Picture as many pleasant details as you can, taking note of feelings of relaxation in your body.

This technique helps to divert attention away from worries and create a sense of tranquility, making it easier to relax and prepare for sleep.

The next two exercises are simple techniques that engage your mind in a calming and non-stimulating way to help you create a peaceful mental state for sleep.

'Sky-Like Mind' Exercise

Lie down in a relaxed position, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths.

Imagine yourself lying in a peaceful open space with a clear blue sky above you. Picture soft, fluffy clouds drifting across the sky.

Picture your thoughts or worries as clouds floating across the sky, gently drifting away.

Let the clouds carry your worries away, feeling more relaxed with each one that fades into the distance.

Play a Word Game

Choose a neutral 5-letter (or longer) word with no repeating letters – such as 'dream'.

Think of as many words as possible that begin with the first letter of your chosen word.

As you come up with each word, take a moment to visualise it clearly in your mind.

Move on to the next letter and repeat until you've worked through the whole word, or until you drift off.

How can I evaluate my sleep?

Understanding our personal sleeping patterns is an important step in making the changes we need.

By recording details similar to the template below, we can record factors that might be influencing our sleeping cycle and quality.

Date	When I Slept	Duration	Quality	Notes

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate your sleep quality on this day

Write about activities like physical exercise, napping, caffeine intake, or medications here.

tech savvy?
many smartphone applications contain sleep-trackers that make the process easier!

If you notice your sleeping pattern is interfering with your day-to-day life or causing you distress, speak to your doctor for support.

Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Directorate