

Sleep Health – Fact Sheet

Most people without realising do not get quality sleep every night. It has become normal for people to dream about work; take a long time to fall asleep or wake up of a morning; constantly waking up during the night; needing to use the bathroom in the night; feeling exhausted and unrefreshed of a morning; the list goes on.

Sleep is important for many different reasons, from mental and physical health, to your quality of life and safety. When you are sleeping your brain and body is restoring and preparing you for a new day. Without quality sleep your hormones become unbalanced, the body cannot repair any damage to its heart and blood vessels, muscles and tissues cannot repair, your immune system becomes compromised, and brain function is not as sharp. Over a long period, sleep deprivation can lead to chronic health conditions.

There are various reasons as to why you may be experiencing poor quality sleep, however the most common being stress. Below are some useful ideas that may improve your sleep quality.

1. **Go to sleep at the same time each night!** Much easier said than done as we associate weekends with staying up later and sleeping in. This can throw out our sleep/wake cycle and hormones required for healthy sleep patterns, hence why everyone seems to be on struggle street come Monday morning at work.
2. **Limit technology close to bed time** (this includes technology while lying in bed). Our body is extremely clever and has a specific biological cycle of body processors that allows it to have a rough idea of what time of day it is, therefore using bright lights close to bed time tricks the body into thinking its morning again. Try to refrain from using your phone or computer at least 1 hour before sleep time if you are sensitive to it.
3. **Eating food close to bed time.** Eating a big meal just before sleeping requires energy for the body to break down and metabolise the food which can keep us more alert. It can also promote the onset of reflux and heartburn. If you are really hungry close to bed time try eating a small snack such as some raw nuts, few spoonful's of yoghurt or a glass of warm milk. Try to avoid sugary foods even fruit as this can make you more alert!
4. **Protein with dinner.** Protein is required for blood sugar regulation and also for its role in melatonin and serotonin synthesis, therefore consuming adequate protein with dinner is important for a good quality sleep.
5. **Aim for 8 hours of sleep.** This is the average amount of sleep required for most individuals with adolescents and young children requiring a little more. The more sleep you can get before midnight the better you will feel! Our bodies seem to produce more of the growth hormone when we go to sleep before midnight, allowing the adequate repair of our heart and blood vessels, muscles and tissues and our immune system.
6. **Caffeine.** This can be a tricky one as some people can sleep well when they have caffeine right before bed, quite often because they have consumed significant amounts of caffeine during the day that the body no longer responds the same way anymore, which is not a good

thing! As caffeine is a strong stimulant a majority of people will not be able to consume caffeine after about 2-3pm and still sleep well come 9pm. Try to stick to 1 cup of coffee/tea each day preferably in the morning and refrain from having caffeine after 3pm.

7. **Exercise.** Again some people can exercise close to bed time and experience no difficulty sleeping, however many people cannot. If you have trouble sleeping of a night time try to avoid exercise 3 hours before bed time so that your nervous system is able to calm down in time. Exercising in the morning or during the day has actually been proven to improve sleep quality.
8. **Relaxing.** This is often the most important aspect that needs to be managed to improve sleep quality. While meditation is recommended this is not something most people want to try or feel like learning during periods of stress. Try engaging in other forms of lighter exercise (yoga, Pilates or walking) either in the mornings or later afternoon to relax. Some people find just having dinner with a friend or partner enough to wind down for the day. Hot baths with magnesium salts, taking a good quality magnesium supplement or herbal teas can also be very beneficial in calming your nervous system. Finding your own way to wind down and relax is critical!
9. **What if you can't get to sleep?** So you go to bed because you are tired but before you know it the lights go off and it's like a light bulb in your head has turned on and you are wide awake again. Sound familiar? The best thing you can do is get back out of bed and go sit somewhere else and read a book or do something that doesn't require technology until you feel tired again.

Customised nutritional plans comprising of a specific food plan with the support of nutrient/herbal supplements can be very effective in improving your sleep health. If you require support please visit www.good4younutrition.com.au