

healthy LIVING

SLEEP ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH?



Do you bounce out of bed in the morning, refreshed and ready for the day ahead? Or, is it more a groggy, grumpy shuffle to the kitchen for a wake-up jolt from a cup of coffee?

Good quality sleep is essential to body and mind. It affects the way we look and feel and how well we perform during the day. Yet so many people struggle to sleep peacefully and don't get anywhere near the recommended eight to nine hours of sleep a night. Research suggests many people only get around six hours and **75% have trouble sleeping soundly** at least a couple of nights a week.

There are many reasons to make peaceful slumber a number one priority every night. Here are some of the most important:

Happiness – If you were in this morning's groggy, grumpy group, you have probably already figured out that lack of sleep means lack of happiness. Just a few sleepless nights can leave you feeling irritable, impatient, overwhelmed and stressed out.

Brain power – During sleep our brain is on a filing mission, organising information learned throughout the day and committing things to memory. People learn and memorise facts better and make better decisions when they've had a chance to 'sleep on it'. Lack of sleep equals foggy thinking.

Healthy weight – If you're feeling the bulge, explore your sleep patterns. Sleep deprivation can cause weight gain and prevent weight loss by affecting how we process food and store fat. Lack of sleep can affect our appetite hormones, leading to over eating and food cravings. Being overweight also contributes to poor sleep and sleep disorders such as sleep apnoea (sleep related breathing disorder).

Staying safe – Lack of sleep can make you accident prone. If you don't get enough sleep at night, your body might try and make up for it during the day. A desperate need to sleep could kick in while you're driving or engaged in another risky task. That foggy thinking could mean you miscalculate when you're behind the wheel and run a red.

Heart health – Your heart deserves a rest too. Sleep problems have been linked to high blood pressure, increased stress hormone levels (which make your heart work too hard) and irregular heartbeat. Long term sleep deprivation increases your risk of chronic heart disease.

Immune health – Lack of sleep can lower immunity, meaning a greater chance of getting sick and, long term, a greater chance of chronic disease. Sleep deprivation has been associated with accelerated ageing and a number of chronic lifestyle illnesses.

When we sleep, our body takes the opportunity to refresh and regenerate. During good quality sleep, we move through phases of light, slow wave and Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep.

Each of these phases provides a unique health benefit to body and mind. A healthy sleeper – who has allowed themselves eight or nine hours sleep – will move through these phases three or four times in a night. But many of us are missing out because we only get six hours a night or have difficulty falling asleep in the first place. Others wake up during the night – and during a sleep phase – and struggle to get back to sleep.

To increase your chances of getting a good night's sleep, commit to a sleep plan:

- Use up your energy during the day, with regular exercise, so that you're physically tired at night
- Watch what you eat and drink in the hours before bed
- Create a peaceful sleep environment
- Establish a sleep routine.

Make sure you don't have caffeine after 2pm. The body can take several hours to metabolise caffeine and if you indulge in a cappuccino too late in the day, it might just keep you awake at night. Avoid over stimulating foods and drinks such as sugar and alcohol too. Make your evening meal a healthy one that isn't too heavy and is easy to digest.

A peaceful sleep environment means a peaceful room, with a comfortable bed and without distractions such as too much noise, light or interference from televisions, computers, cell phones or clocks. Keep the bedroom for sleeping and love-making only.

Make sure you invest in a bed that is supportive and cosy and make sure your bedroom is an ambient temperature and well ventilated. Block out any light, including street lights, with curtains or blinds and don't use night lights. Your body knows it's time for sleep when it's completely dark. That's when an important sleep hormone called melatonin is released and this kick starts sleep.

A sleep routine helps you settle. Start getting ready for bed about 30-40 minutes before you want to sleep. Switch off the TV or other distractions and enjoy a soothing drink, to help you wind down. During this wind down time, enjoy a hot bath or shower, a few chapters of a good book or listen to some relaxing music. If you are stressed or pressured at work, try recording your thoughts and worries on a notepad or in a diary so they're not playing out in your mind as you try to sleep.

Once you have established a sleep plan, you will find sleep becomes easier and more restful. Like everything, your new routine needs to be practiced over time. With patience and persistence, you should eventually find yourself enjoying the many health benefits of a deep and peaceful sleep, as nature intended.

