

SLEEP HYGIENE

These are general guidelines, and some or all of these may assist you with sleep. Everyone's rhythms are different, so it is important to adapt these to you. These guidelines do not preclude your use of medication or other professional advice about sleep.

Hours of sleep

The National Sleep Foundation has developed age-specific recommended sleep durations based on a systematic review of world scientific literature relating sleep duration to health, performance and safety (2015). These scientific guidelines indicate the amount of sleep we need each night to improve our sleep health!

Category	Age - years	Hours/day
Newborns	0 - 3 months	14 - 17
Infants	4 - 11 months	12 - 15
Toddlers	1 - 2	11 - 14
Pre- schoolers	3 - 5	10 - 13
School age children	6 - 13	9 - 11
Teenagers	14 - 17	8 - 10
Younger adults (new age category)	18 - 25	7 - 9
Adults	26 - 64	7 - 9
Older adults (new age category)	65+	7 - 8

Your circadian rhythms

The age-old adage of *'go to bed when the sun goes down and get up when it comes up'*, is totally valid! That is, outside factors like lightness and darkness are demonstrated to impact your sleep patterns.

Your circadian rhythm is a 24-hour internal clock that is running in the background of your brain. It is also known as your sleep/wake cycle and moves you between sleepiness and alertness at regular intervals during the day/night.

A part of your brain (the hypothalamus) controls your circadian rhythm. When it's dark at night, your eyes send a signal to the hypothalamus that it's time to feel tired. Your brain, in turn, sends a signal to your body to release **melatonin**, which makes your body tired.

It is now well accepted that a **regular time to go to bed and to get up**, regardless of your commitments e.g. working day, weekend, assists these rhythms.

What and when you eat

Healthy, well-balanced nutrition can assist you to sleep well, but timing is important. A heavy meal soon before bed can interrupt sleep. Some people find that an empty stomach at bedtime is distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack.

Certain foods contain an amino acid called **tryptophan** that causes sleepiness e.g. a warm glass of milk. Chamomile tea is also known for its calming properties. A good Nutritionist can assist with your meal planning and before bed snacks.

Stimulants

There are **natural** stimulants like exercise and **chemical** stimulants such as alcohol and caffeine.

Regular exercise for many is stress releasing. However strenuous exercise 3-4 hours prior to bedtime creates overactivity in your body and brain and interferes with restful sleep. Similarly, energetic yogic breathing practices e.g. kapalabhati and for some, meditation, create increased alertness in the brain and interfere with sleep.

Alcohol is a relaxant and may help you to fall asleep however it stops you from entering the deeper stages of sleep i.e. it disrupts sleep over the night. One to two alcohol free days/week are now a recommended guideline. Caffeine contains a stimulant called **adenosine** that works by blocking the action of hormones in the brain that make us feel sleepy. Avoid these chemical stimulants for 4-6 hours prior to bed.

Exposure to light – screen time before bed

Using TVs, smartphones, laptops, or other electronic devices before bed, delays your body's internal clock i.e. your circadian rhythm, suppresses the release of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin, and makes it more difficult to fall asleep. This is largely due to the short-wavelength, artificial blue light that is emitted by these devices.

The more electronic devices you use in the evening, the harder it can be to fall asleep or stay asleep. Initiate a digital curfew - try setting the curfew at two hours before bed, three hours before bed —the earlier in the evening the better and notice the difference.

Environment

The conditions for rest (as detailed in Module 3) are very relevant for getting to and staying asleep, namely: **still, quiet, dark, warm**. Again your body temperature may be different to others, so several layers on the bed may be better than one heavy thick doona. An eye pillow or eye mask is effective for screening out light and as above keep your devices out of your bedroom!

Wake up – get out of bed

If you do not get to sleep after about 20 minutes or so of going to bed, get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy again, then return to bed. Ideally complete some of the following practices in this Module.

Avoid doing anything that is too stimulating or interesting, as this will wake you up even more. Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping, so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep. If you use bed as a place to watch TV, work on your laptop, your body will not learn this connection.

Diary and self-talk

We all have good and bad night's sleep – don't beat yourself up!

Writing down your worries before bed, diarising your day and releasing any concerns, putting in place necessary plans for tomorrow before retiring, all assist in allowing your mind to slow down so that you can sleep!

Notice what works, do more of this – notice what gets in the way of your sleep, do less of this!

What is insomnia?

According to national guidelines, insomnia is difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. People with insomnia can feel dissatisfied with their sleep and usually experience one or more of the following symptoms: fatigue, low energy, difficulty concentrating, mood disturbances, and decreased performance in work. People with insomnia tend to have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, and/or waking too early.

How long does insomnia last?

Acute insomnia is brief and often happens because of life circumstances (for example, the night before an exam, after receiving stressful or bad news). This tends to resolve.

Chronic insomnia is disrupted sleep that occurs at least three nights per week and lasts at least three months. People with chronic insomnia may benefit from some form of assistance to help them get back to healthy sleep patterns.

Source: National Sleep Foundation