

GOOD SLEEP

7 to 9 hours



An essential element of a healthy lifestyle!

On average, adults need 7–9 hours of sleep a night. However, some people only require four hours and others need ten. Insomnia, the inability to get adequate or good quality sleep, is a common sleep disturbance among adults.

Between 20-30% Australians have a problem with sleep.¹

Significant sleep difficulties can impact almost every area of your life including healthy living, work performance and relationships. 17 hours without sleep causes similar impairment to a 0.05 blood alcohol level and 24 hours without sleep equates to a 0.10% blood alcohol level.²

How Sleep Works: Your Body Clock

The body has two ways to control your sleep:

- A brain chemical called adenosine, and
- Your body clock

Adenosine, a natural chemical, builds up in your body over many hours of being awake, and this tells your brain that it needs to sleep.

Your body clock has two timers controlling body rhythms:

- 24 hour cycles (circadian rhythms)
- 90 minute cycles (ultradian rhythms)

These rhythms affect your alertness, energy and sleep patterns.

Your body responds to a 24 hour pattern of day and night – your circadian rhythm. You are usually most awake at about 9:00am and 9:00pm. The two times when your body most wants to sleep is around 3:00am and 3:00pm.

Individual body clocks may vary, so you need to work out your body rhythm and how it is affected by stress, work and lifestyle factors. For example, notice what time you feel tired during the evening and go to bed then. You may miss a wave of sleep if you ignore this tiredness.

You also have a 90 minute body clock, known as your ultradian rhythm. During an eight hour period, most people will have five 90 minute cycles. The sleep cycle starts with two stages of light sleep, followed by two stages of deeper sleep and then a stage of sleep called REM (rapid eye movement) sleep when most dreaming happens.

People who have problems sleeping often wake up at 90 minute periods for example, at the end of a sleep cycle, when they are in a light stage of sleep and easily disturbed. Your 90 minute body clock affects you even when you are awake. This explains why you have periods during the day when you feel sleepy, which subside after about 30 minutes.



1 Harrington, Carmel. The Complete Guide to a Good Night's Sleep. Macmillan Publishers Aus., 2014. 2. Nature, Vol 388, July
2 Nature, Vol 388, July



GOOD SLEEP

7 to 9 hours

Tips for Improving Sleep

If you genuinely want to experience better sleep, you need to make a commitment to improving it and follow this up with actions to make a difference.

To establish successful restorative sleep, experts suggest:



Routine. Establish a regular schedule. Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day. Notice when you feel sleepy during the evening and make this your bedtime.



Environment. Create a quiet, comfortable sleep environment. Invest in light blocking, soundabsorbing curtains and a good mattress. Minimise noise and keep the room temperature cool (between 16–18 degrees celcius).



Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and can be disruptive to sleep. Alcohol alters sleep patterns so that less “deep sleep” (stage III and IV) is experienced. Avoid these substances at least 4 hours before going to bed.



Exercise regularly. Exercise helps you sleep better. Doing vigorous activity before going to bed can keep you awake, so exercise at least three hours before going to sleep.



Check medications for side effects. Such as sleeplessness. Appetite suppressants, some cold and allergy medicines, and certain prescription drugs can cause insomnia.



Restrict fluid intake. Limit or restrict fluid intake within three hours of bedtime.



Use your bed only for sleep and sex. Experts suggest that you get out of bed if you are having trouble sleeping, move into another room, try reading for 20–30 minutes or listen to soothing music, and return only when you are sleepy again.



Relax before bedtime. Finish the business of the day at least an hour before going to bed. Wind down by listening to music, reading a book, or meditating.



Clear your mind. Visualise relaxing environments, such as deserted beaches or mountain streams. You may find it helpful to have a “dump pad” by the bed, to write down things you want to remember (so you can get on with the job of sleeping).



Turn off all screens at least 30 minutes prior to going to bed.



Take a hot shower half an hour before bed. As your temperature drops your melatonin will rise helping you feel sleepy.