

Sleep Advice

Sleep has a number of essential functions. There is no 'normal' in terms of how many hours sleep we require, but adults ideally require on average a minimum 8 hours sleep, children up to 10 hours sleep a night.

Healthy sleep patterns protect mental health as well as physical health. It is an essential part of our immune system function.

Our bodies have an in built 'Circadian' rhythm which affects brain and physical function. Melatonin is a natural sleep hormone produced by our bodies in the evening to trigger sleep. Melatonin also acts as a natural anti-depressant. By improving our sleep, we can improve our mood also. To encourage this we need to keep to daily routines of sleeping and waking.

Top Tips

1. Maintain the same wake up time every day, even if you have had a bad night's sleep.
2. It seems obvious, but look at how comfortable your bed is- is your mattress right for you? Buying a good mattress is a worthwhile long term investment. Is the bedroom restful to you? What can you do to make it more welcoming?
3. Avoid going back to bed during the day. If you must have a sleep, limit this to 20 minutes.
4. Avoid Caffeine after 12 midday. Caffeine has a long half-life and remains in the system for 6-12 hours. Remember, many soft drinks contain caffeine.
5. Try to get sunlight onto your face in the morning, even if this is sitting by a sunny window. Sunlight stimulates our natural rhythm to wake up and 're-sets' our body clock.
6. If you can, increase your activity levels during the day. If you go to bed physically tired you will sleep better. Try to avoid exercise just before bed though, as this may keep you awake.
7. Develop a bedtime routine so that your body and mind become used to settling in the evening. Allow yourself time to relax, dim the lights. A warm bath can trigger sleep hormones.
8. If you are feeling stressed, this can impact on your sleep. It can be a vicious cycle as lack of sleep affects our mental health too. Think about what activities relax you as an individual. Wherever possible, try to address the causes of your stress. A Manchester GP, Dr Rangan Chatterjee has written a good self- help book called 'The Stress Solution' which is available in hard back / kindle or as an audio book. Dr Chatterjee also interviews experts in lifestyle on his podcast 'Feel better live more'. His interview with Matthew Walker about sleep is very informative.
9. To help with relaxation you may wish to try a free mindfulness app called 'Insight timer' which has lots of different guided relaxation/meditations including some for sleep.
10. Avoid drinking alcohol in the evening .Many people drink alcohol to help get them to sleep. Alcohol can make you feel a bit more drowsy initially, but it actually interferes with sleep and causes sleep disturbance. Alcohol acts as a depressant and can make mood problems worse.

11. Avoid watching TV, looking at smart phones /tablets or playing game consoles within an hour of bedtime- these all emit blue light which wakes up your brain. Don't take your phone to bed with you. If you must read using a smart phone or tablet, you can buy orange tinted glasses on line, which cut out the blue light.
12. Maintain a dark, cool environment in the bedroom to promote restful sleep.
13. If you can't get to sleep after 20minutes-don't stay in bed otherwise your brain will associate bed with restless behaviour rather than sleep. Get up out of bed and read or listen to soft music, do the ironing! Wait until you are feeling sleepy before going back to bed. Keep lights dimmed and avoid drinking tea/coffee.
14. Older people may need less sleep. If you are inactive during the day, don't expect to sleep 8 hours a night especially if you also nap during the day.
15. In certain circumstances you may need to discuss your symptoms with a doctor e.g menopausal women experiencing sleep disturbance or if you are having night sweats at any age or having snoring issues.
16. There is a very good free insomnia treatment app called 'Sleepful' produced by experienced sleep professionals.
17. For more information 'Why we sleep' by Matthew walker is very helpful.