

The Importance of Sleep

We can't live without it, and we spend nearly a third of our entire lives doing it—yet few of us pay attention to the phenomenon of sleep.

Research shows that healthy sleep is a vital component of a flourishing life. Sleep deprivation, like starvation, can have damaging consequences to health and wellbeing.

Learning to prioritize sleep in your life, create healthy sleeping patterns, and effectively manage sleep-related disorders can have a powerful effect on your overall wellbeing.

Good sleep can:

- Decrease stress
- Improve mood
- Enhance concentration
- Keep chronic illness at bay

How can I get a better night's sleep?

You can feel more refreshed and energised than if you sleep the same number of hours at different times, even if you only alter your sleep schedule by an hour or two.

Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day. This helps set your body's internal clock and optimize the quality of your sleep. Choose a bedtime when you normally feel tired, so that you don't toss and turn. If you're getting enough sleep, you should wake up naturally without an alarm. If you need an alarm clock, you may need an earlier bedtime.

Avoid sleeping in—even on weekends. The more your weekend/weekday sleep schedules differ, the worse the jetlag-like symptoms you'll experience. If you need to make up for a late night, opt for a daytime nap rather than sleeping in. This allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm.

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Be smart about napping. While napping is a good way to make up for lost sleep, if you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night, napping can make things worse. Limit naps to 15 to 20 minutes in the early afternoon.

Fight after-dinner drowsiness. If you get sleepy way before your bedtime, get off the couch and do something mildly stimulating, such as washing the dishes, calling a friend, or getting clothes ready for the next day. If you give in to the drowsiness, you may wake up later in the night and have trouble getting back to sleep.

Expose yourself to bright sunlight in the morning. The closer to the time you get up, the better. Have your coffee outside, for example, or eat breakfast by a sunny window. The light on your face will help you wake up

Let as much natural light into your home or workspace as possible. Keep curtains and blinds open during the day and try to move your desk closer to the window.

Avoid bright screens within 1-2 hours of your bedtime. The blue light emitted by your phone, tablet, computer, or TV is especially disruptive. You can minimize the impact by using devices with smaller screens, turning the brightness down, or using dark modes on some browsers.

When it's time to sleep, make sure the room is dark. Use heavy curtains or shades to block light from windows or try a sleep mask. Also, consider covering up electronics that emit light.

Keep the lights down if you get up during the night. If you need some light to move around safely, try installing a dim nightlight in the hall or bathroom or using a small flashlight. This will make it easier for you to fall back to sleep.

Limit caffeine and nicotine. You might be surprised to know that caffeine can cause sleep problems up to ten to twelve hours after drinking it! Similarly, smoking is another stimulant that can disrupt your sleep, especially if you smoke close to bedtime.

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Avoid big meals at night. Try to make dinnertime earlier in the evening, and avoid heavy, rich foods within two hours of bed. Spicy or acidic foods can cause stomach trouble and heartburn.

Make relaxation your goal, not sleep. If you wake up in the middle of the night and find it hard to fall back asleep, try a relaxation technique such as visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation, which can be done without even getting out of bed. Even though it's not a replacement for sleep, relaxation can still help rejuvenate your body.

Postpone worrying and brainstorming. If you wake during the night feeling anxious about something, make a brief note of it on paper and postpone worrying about it until the next day when it will be easier to resolve. Similarly, if a great idea is keeping you awake, make a note of it on paper and fall back to sleep knowing you'll be much more productive after a good night's rest