



Getting the sleep you need

Are you feeling tired? Not getting enough sleep?
Waking up during the night?

Sleep is important for all of us, to help our bodies recover and recharge. Being alert and active during the day helps us to get a good night's sleep, and it's important to get into regular patterns of sleep and physical activity.

Being sick, being in pain or stressed, anxious or depressed can interrupt our regular patterns. Depression, in particular, can lead to:

- Finding it hard to get to sleep
- Sleeping badly
- Sleeping less than you normally would
- Waking up during the night
- Waking up early in the morning and not being able to get back to sleep.

When it comes down to it, it's not the total length of sleep that really matters. It's how good the sleep is for your body and whether you're getting what doctors call 'deep sleep' that makes the difference. Deep sleep usually occurs during the first five hours of the night. So if you only sleep for four or five hours, you'll get as much deep sleep as someone who's sleeping for eight to ten hours.

If you don't get enough sleep, you might:

- Be tired during the day
- Find it hard to concentrate
- Be moody or easily annoyed
- Have aching muscles
- Get sick easier or more often
- Find it difficult to recover from depression.

So looking back over the last two weeks, have you:

- Been tired all the time?
- Been spending more time in bed?
- Slept badly or less?
- Been napping during the day?
- Cut down on physical activities?

If you've answered **YES** to one or more of these questions, you might find the tips on this fact sheet helpful to get the sleep you need.

Tips to improve your sleep

There are lots of things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep.

When you wake up

- Get up and out of bed as soon as you can - don't go back to sleep or try to make up for lost time.
- Try and get up at the same time each morning, perhaps around 7-7.30am.
- Go outside in the fresh air and/or do something active.

During the day

- Don't nap. Napping will make you less tired when you go to bed, which means it'll take you longer to fall asleep.
- Make time during the day to sort out the problems that you might worry about at night. See the [getting things sorted](#) fact sheet for tips on ways to work out your problems.
- Keep a sleep-wake diary, which lists the hours you've been asleep and awake.
- Try to be more active in the early morning or late afternoon (while the sun is still up).
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine after about 4.00pm (such as coffee, strong tea, coke, etc). Also avoid drinking more than two of these drinks per day.

Going to bed

- Avoid going to bed too early - it's not the right time for deep sleep. The best time to head to bed is around 10-10.30pm.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or smoking before you go to bed. Alcohol may cause you to sleep less deeply and wake up more often; smoking may put you on edge meaning you'll find it difficult to get to sleep.
- Make sure you've eaten and gone to the toilet before you go to bed.
- Avoid working out or playing sport late at night.
- Give yourself time to wind down before going to bed. Stop studying or working at least 30 minutes beforehand.
- Avoid watching TV or reading in bed, as this may make you restless when you try to sleep.
- Avoid taking sleeping pills. If you do need them, try not to take them for more than a week because they can be addictive.
- Try to have a routine that you can follow every night before going to bed - for example, having a bath or shower, then putting on your pyjamas, then brushing your teeth.





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Tips for sleeping well

- Try to make your bedroom quiet, dim and cool.
- Avoid too many blankets or using electric blankets. If you're too hot, you don't go into deep sleep and you're more likely to have disturbing dreams.

Solving long term sleep problems

For some people, the problems they have getting to sleep may last for weeks, months or even years. Not surprisingly, this sometimes leads to anxiety about getting to sleep, which only makes the problem worse. In this case, it might be necessary to take specific steps to help you get to sleep.

1. Get up if you can't get to sleep after trying for 15 to 20 minutes. Staying in bed when you're feeling restless or anxious doesn't usually lead to you falling asleep.

2. Do something quiet or distracting (such as listening to music or taking a warm bath. If you've got a lot on your mind, it might be helpful to do something that makes you concentrate on other things (such as reading, drawing or playing a video game for a short time). By distracting yourself from your worries, you might find it easier to wind down.
3. When you feel relaxed and sleepy, go back to bed.
4. If you're still awake after a further 15 to 20 minutes of trying to sleep, get out of bed again.
5. Repeat this process until you fall asleep shortly after returning to bed.

After a few nights, you should find that it becomes a bit easier to get to sleep because you've stopped feeling anxious and restless when you're in bed. Although by following this plan you might end up spending less time in bed, the quality of the time you do spend in bed will be better.



Source

Hickie et al. (2000). *Educational Health Solutions*.
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More information

Ybblue fact sheet: Getting active to beat depression
 Ybblue fact sheet: Drinking and drugs
 Ybblue fact sheet: Getting things sorted

Ybblue is a youth program of *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*. For more information about depression, anxiety and related disorders, see www.beyondblue.org.au

