

MISSING SLEEP?

When good sleep goes, so does everything that depends on it. And everything depends on it!

Disrupted sleep can be a nightmare! It can be the result of mental or emotional unrest, physical discomfort, or a sign that you're being affected by stress. Or maybe you've had children and you haven't found your rhythm yet. Either way, lying in bed unable to sleep can be a great source of additional worry and frustration. Good sleep is just as critical to our health and wellbeing as what we eat or drink. Scientists have shown that good-quality sleep:

- Helps with healthy brain function, and consolidates learning, memories and the processing of emotions.
- Helps our body and brain recuperate and conserve energy.
- Keeps our heart healthy.
- Assists with immune system function so we're less likely to get sick.
- Helps regulate our metabolism.
- Helps remove toxins from the body.

So it's worth spending some time to make sure you're getting the most that sleep can provide.

First, let's look at a few of the common sleep myths, because research shows that incorrect beliefs can be a major contributor to bad sleep:

BELIEF: When I don't get a proper amount of sleep on a given night, I need to catch up the next day by napping or sleeping longer the next night.

FACT: This can actually make sleep problems worse. You'll generally have a good sleep the next night anyway, so avoid napping.

BELIEF: When I have trouble getting to sleep, I should stay in bed and try harder.

FACT: This will likely make it worse, get out of bed and read a book until you feel tired, and try again.

BELIEF: When I sleep poorly on one night, I know it will disturb my sleep schedule for the whole week.

FACT: It's normal to have one or two nights of bad sleep – your sleep system will naturally correct itself.

BELIEF: I feel like I have no control over my racing mind at night.

FACT: It's common for people to worry just before bedtime. Try to calm and distract yourself from your thoughts, and use relaxation techniques (see below for some ideas).

SLEEP HYGIENE

Now that you are aware of some of the myths of sleep, you can build your best nights sleep ever! That will involve what we call sleep hygiene, which is really just a personalised plan to optimise your sleep based upon what we know works for problem sleepers.

1. Develop sleep rituals; These will train your body it's time to sleep. Do relaxing stretches or slow breathing exercises for eight to 10 minutes before bed each night, or sit calmly with a cup of caffeine-free tea.

2. Stick to your sleep windows; Only try to sleep when you actually feel tired or sleepy. We all have a sleep window (usually between 9 and 11.30 pm) when we naturally feel tired and want to sleep – use it!
3. Schedule your bathtime; Having a hot bath an hour or two before bedtime raises your body temperature, causing you to feel sleepy as it drops afterwards.
4. Count how much sleep you need; Work out how many hours of sleep you need to function well. Once you know your magic number, subtract this from the time you need to get up in the morning to work out when you should go to bed.
5. Keep daytime routine the same; Even if you're tired after a bad night's sleep, it's important to try to keep your daytime activities the same as planned.
6. Watch your screen time; Avoid using devices two hours before bed. Screens have blue light, which interferes with melatonin production and interrupts sleep. If you must use a device, use an app to change your screen to amber light in the evening.
7. Keep the bed for sleeping; Don't use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex. That way your body comes to associate your bed only with sleep.
8. Get up and try again later; If you haven't been able to get to sleep after about 20 minutes, go to another room and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy, then try again. Avoid doing anything too stimulating or interesting, as this will wake you up even more.
9. Avoid clock-watching; Frequently checking the clock during the night can wake you up and reinforces negative thoughts like, 'Oh no, look how late it is. I'll never get to sleep now.'
10. Prepare your sleep space; Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. A cooler room with enough blankets to stay warm is best. Use earplugs to block noise, and curtains or an eye mask to block out early morning light. Invest in a good comfortable bed – you spend a third of your life there!

These ten evidence-based tips will no doubt improve your sleep, allowing you to come alive and thrive rather than just survive!