

Sleep Well



Sometime in our life, we may have trouble sleeping. It is estimated that nearly 20% of adults experience difficulty sleeping on a regular basis.

They may have trouble:

- Falling asleep
- Wake up often during the night
- Sleep lightly and not feel refreshed
- Wake up in the early hours of the morning

It can be because of stress, a sudden change in our routine or even something traumatic. Sometimes we just develop the habit of sleeping poorly. Here are some suggestions to help you maintain good sleeping patterns or to assist you to get back on track, starting with a list of “Dos” and “Don’ts”.

Remember, it may take some weeks before things change for the better, so be patient and try not to worry. Learn to listen to your body and its own individual cycles to find the best strategy for you. However, if you continue to experience problems, you should seek specialist help.

DOs

Develop routines around getting ready for bed to prepare yourself for sleep. This may include brushing your teeth, changing into nightwear, checking the house and picturing success for the next day. You may need to do this a few times before you begin to associate the ritual and a good night’s sleep to follow.

Break bad sleeping habits by maintaining a routine in your life. Try getting up and going to bed around the same times wherever possible, but make sure you allow yourself enough time for sleep. This will help you to get back into a rhythm.

Get plenty of fresh air and exercise during the day. Also, try using a relaxation tape for 20 minutes twice a day to help you practice releasing the tension in your body, first tightening and then releasing each tense area.

Break the association between being in bed and sleeplessness. Try going to bed at night as soon as you feel sleepy. If you don’t fall asleep within 40 minutes of going to bed, get up and do something else that is relaxing and calming in another room until you feel sleepy again.

Keep a journal in which you record thoughts and worries. Then put the journal away before you go to bed and imagine that you are also “putting the worries away”. This will help to create the sense that lying in bed is not the place to think and worry because you will be giving yourself another time and place to do this. If worries begin to creep in as lie down to sleep, remind yourself “just don’t start” and imagine a peaceful sleep washing over you instead.

DON'Ts

Try not to eat or drink tea, coffee or alcohol before going to bed. Caffeine acts as a stimulant, which can keep you awake or make your sleep less satisfying. You should also avoid smoking within half an hour of going to bed as nicotine is also a stimulant.

Don’t sleep or nap during the day, save your sleeping for bed times. Naps during the day may disrupt your sleeping/waking cycle, which can make it harder to get to sleep at night and stay asleep.

Don’t exercise within 2 hours of going to bed and avoid stimulating the senses (e.g. reading an exciting book or watching a scary movie on television), as this will tend to wind you up rather than help you unwind!!

Don’t study, read or watch TV on your bed, keep your bed for sleep or rest. Reduce any stimuli that may be present in the room by darkening your room, and turning your alarm clock away so that the light no longer faces you.

Don’t view your sleeplessness in a negative way. Remind yourself that it is ‘no big deal’ and is something that can be improved rather than thinking it is a catastrophe! Otherwise you will add to your worries by thinking of yourself as a ‘bad sleeper’.

Try changing your focus and consciously try not to fall asleep one night – you may find that the opposite will occur!

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SOME OTHER USEFUL TIPS

- Enhance your sleeping environment by making your bedroom a relaxing and comfortable place. This includes decorating it in a colour scheme that you find relaxing (try light and gentle colours, rather than strong colours); making sure your bed is comfortable with enough warm coverings; and, keeping your bedroom dark, cool and quiet where possible.
- A warm bath or shower about an hour before bed to help relax you, mind and body. You could also use this time to try out your relaxation technique.

For example, visualising yourself as calm, relaxed, floating on the sea, or lying beneath a shady tree or in any other place that you find soothing. This will help to create a sense of peace and clear you of the tensions and anxieties that stop you from falling asleep.

- Sometimes you may need to try taking a supplement (try a health food shop for some herbal supplements) or a warm drink to soothe your nervous system. Try this for about half an hour before going to bed.
- Set aside some time during the day to make plans and get organised. This will reduce the number of things that you might worry about when you lie down to go to sleep.

OTHER SUPPORT

Assistance in this area and many others can also be obtained from the RMIT Student Counselling Service. The RMIT Counselling Service offers free and confidential counselling to all RMIT students. Counsellors may help you explore your concerns, both personal and academic. The Counselling Service can be contacted at the following locations below between 9am and 5pm. You can also find further information and resources to assist you in your studies on our website at www.rmit.edu.au/counselling

RMIT Counselling Service

City campus:	Building 43, Cardigan Street, PH: 9925 4365
Bundoora:	Building 202, Level 3, PH: 9925 4365
Brunswick:	Building 514, Level 2, PH: 9925 4365
Bld. 108:	Level 4, Ph: 9925 4365