

Sleeping Better

Active brains need good sleep to recover and operate at their peak. Poor sleep can lead to lowered ability to learn new information and recall knowledge. Poor sleep can also affect your mood, and make you more prone to anxiety, stress, irritability, and pessimistic and negative thoughts. Improving your sleep can take up to 4+ weeks of routine to “re-train” your body to better sleeping habits.



Did you know?

The brain hormone *Melatonin* regulates when we get sleepy. It is the body’s sleep switch and works best when the body makes a clear signal to turn it “off.” Once off, it then starts building over the next 15-16 hours during the day. It gets switched off by a) light (blue sunlight in particular), and b) by the body warming up. So, it is important that this signal be sudden, not gradual. Computer screens in particular, as well as TV screens at night lower Melatonin and stop you from getting sleepy, and confuse the brain as to when it should be awake. Melatonin is highest around 10.30pm but then cycles up and down every 60-90 min.

Top tips for good sleep

Your bedroom...

- Remove all sources of light and noise wherever possible,
- Make sure there is enough fresh air and room doesn’t get ‘stuffy,’
- Make sure your bedding is not too hot – better to be slightly cool,
- Move your alarm clock or phone so you can’t “clock watch” during the night,
- Never read or study in your bed – preferably only in a different room,
- Keep a note-pad / pen next to your bed to write down things you’re worrying about.



Before you go to sleep...

1. Avoid caffeine after 6.00pm and vigorous exercise at least 2 hours before bed time,
2. Make sure you finish homework at least 45minutes before bedtime to let your mind wind-down,
3. Prepare everything for the next day, and things you need to go to sleep half an hour before you think you’ll be ready to sleep – have your bed and bedroom all set to jump straight into it,
4. Keep lights down low (no computer or TV as light keeps your brain awake), and wind-down doing something relaxing like reading a book or listening to music (turn-off your phone),
5. Wait to “catch the (drowsiness) wave” (every 60-90 min.s) and get straight into bed, lights out and head on the pillow immediately. You have less than 10 minutes before you miss it!
6. If you don’t fall to sleep in 15-20 minutes, get up, repeat and wait for the next drowsiness wave.

During the night...

- Remember it’s normal to wake 1-2 times during the night,
- Let yourself drift back into your last dream if you wake, stay/get in a happy mood,
- Tell yourself that you don’t have to get up yet, so it’s great that you can keep sleeping!
- Avoid getting up to go to the toilet as this trains you to wake when you get a full bladder,
- If you must get up, keep the lights off, and only open your LEFT eye to see.



In the morning...

- Get up every morning at the same time (ideally ~7.00am) – even on weekends!
- Get straight up as soon as you wake – no snoozing!!
- Open the blinds in your room and look into the sky for 5 minutes,
- Do some light exercise straight away, e.g. walk around the block,
- Have a good breakfast, coffee if you want to,
- Make sure you do some exercise during the day (this will make you sleepier),
- Make sure you don’t have any naps during the day, including the afternoon when you get home from school – stay awake all day until bedtime that night.

