

Not Getting Your Best Night's Sleep?

How Losing Sleep Can Affect Your Everyday Functioning

WHAT IS SLEEP?

Sleep is shown to be the most effective form of re-energising and recovery. Sleep impacts our functioning, mood, memory, and general health. Sleep difficulties are very common and may impact on your mental and physical health. Research shows that 30% of the population have trouble sleeping, whether that is getting to sleep, staying asleep, waking up early or getting poor quality sleep. While the idea of 7-8 hours is common, the amount of sleep that we need is variable, with some people needing as little as 4 or 5 hours, and some needing up to 10 hours sleep to feel rested. Our need for sleep is affected by factors such as gender, age, and our level of daily activity.



STAGES OF SLEEP

REM (rapid-eye-movement) occurs for about 25% of the night. It involves electrical activation of the brain, relaxed muscles, rapid eye movements and sometimes dreaming. REM sleep provides energy to the brain and body and supports daytime performance.

NREM non-rapid-eye-movement sleep occurs during the other 75% of the time, and can be further broken down into 4 stages:

- Stage 1- light sleep, between being awake and falling asleep
- Stage 2 - onset of sleep, body temperature drops, breathing and heart rate become regular
- Stages 3 & 4 - deepest and most restorative sleep, known as 'delta sleep'.

During delta sleep, blood pressure drops, breathing slows, muscles relax and blood supply, tissue growth and repair occurs, and hormones are released.

WHAT AFFECTS SLEEP?

- Aging - sleep changes as we age, and we tend to sleep less, and less deeply as we get older.
- Physical or medical issues - needing to go to the toilet, pain, restlessness or medications.
- Stress, anxiety and worry - thoughts and concerns effect our ability to relax into sleep.
- Depression and low mood - can lead to disturbed sleep, oversleeping and not feeling restored.
- Environment - temperature, comfort noise levels, and light can all effect the quality of sleep.
- Disrupted routines - shift work or sleeping during the day can contribute to sleeping difficulties.



KEY TIPS TO SLEEP?

- Try to resolve any contributing issues - whether this is addressing medical issues, medications, improving your physical environment, or addressing worries that are keeping you awake. If issues can't be solved, try to find a way to set them aside such as writing them down to deal with later.
- Try not to worry about not getting enough sleep - when sleep is hard to find this worry may contribute to the tension that you feel and make it even more difficult.
- Reduce caffeine, cigarettes and alcohol - these can all effect your ability to get to quality sleep.
- Avoid heavy meals within 2 hours of when you want to sleep.
- Reduce or remove naps, and try waking up at a fairly regular time
- Reduce your screen use at the end of the day, especially in bed.
- Routine - develop a restful routine before a regular bed time. Give yourself time to unwind.
- Relaxation and meditation can help, try using an app or a guided recording.
- Gradually increasing your exercise levels can help to make you feel more tired and ready for sleep.

Getting good sleep is an important part of managing our physical and mental health, and making sure we are able to function at our best. For more sleep strategies, contact the EAP line on 1300 878 379