



SocialLed guide to sleep

Sleep is vital for our health, helping our mind and body to function at their best. It is key to our mood, productivity, feeling vital, focused and able to relate to others positively.

Sleep problems are fairly common. In fact, one in four people experience sleep difficulties, which include trouble falling asleep, trouble staying asleep, early morning waking, sleeping too much, or restless or unsatisfying sleep.

Getting a good night's sleep can improve your mental well-being and help you to better manage feelings, such as, anxiety. The good news is that there are things you can do to improve your sleep.



Scientists understand that neither the body nor the brain “shut down” when we sleep; in fact, they are often working even harder than they do during the day, undergoing processes to restore cells, process information, and improve health.

The human body follows a natural, (approximately) 24-hour pattern called the circadian rhythm. This rhythm is influenced by the environment (such as lightness or darkness) as well as your genetic makeup and determines your sleep patterns by releasing hormones when it's time to sleep. Abnormalities in the circadian rhythm can lead to sleep disorders like insomnia.

1. Sleep has two main phases—REM and non-REM. We spend about a quarter of our sleeping lives in the REM phase, which is a period of vigorous brain activity, marked by vivid dreams. This stage may be responsible for consolidating information and processing memories, which is why babies (whose entire days are full of new experiences the brain needs to process) spend twice as much time in REM sleep than adults do.
2. Non-REM sleep has three to four distinct stages (depending on which experts you ask). These grow gradually deeper throughout the night until it becomes very difficult to be disturbed from sleep. During this time, the body works to gently lower the heart rate, temperature, and breathing rate.



1. RECOVERY FROM WEAR AND TEAR.

Many researchers have suggested the restorative effects of sleeping. This doesn't just mean that the body rests during sleep—rather, the cells busily regenerate.

2. HELPING LEARNING AND MEMORY.

Not only do you need rest to sustain the attention and concentration necessary to learn new tasks, but according to Harvard's Division of Sleep Medicine, sleep is a time for the brain to consolidate memories, which makes learning new things easier. A study in *Natural Neuroscience* showed that people can even learn completely new behaviours while they are sleep.

3. SUPPORTING IMMUNE FUNCTION

Your body produces special proteins called cytokines, which help your immune system fight off infection. More of these proteins are produced during sleep when you are sick, which is one of the reasons you may feel so tired when you have the flu. Rest gives the body the time it needs to produce these infection-fighting proteins and to restore itself to wellness.

SO HOW CAN I SLEEP BETTER?



BE COMFORTABLE...

If you want to have a good sleep, it helps to create a comfortable sleep environment. Make sure that you have a supportive mattress and fresh, comfortable bedding.

Also, try to ensure that your room is not too hot or cold, minimize noise, and block out light. Go one step further and make the room as beautiful as possible.

RELAX...

Have a 90 minute window before sleep and start this time with a relaxation exercise.

Here are some ideas:

- Try taking a hot bath with lavender oil (or something else!)
- Try a relaxation exercise like mindful breathing
- Listen to calming music.



BE AWARE OF YOUR BLOOD SUGAR...

Have a snack. Although a heavy meal late in the evening can disrupt sleep, a healthy light snack in the evening can improve sleep.

Try eating light cheese and crackers, turkey, or bananas, or drink a warm glass of milk. These foods promote sleep. Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods. Be aware that if your blood sugar dips in the night, through alcohol or sugary food consumption you are likely to wake up. If you do it pays dividends to get up and have a snack and then return to bed when sleepy. Otherwise, your hungry body may not let you sleep.

EXERCISE REGULARY...

People who exercise tend to have more restful sleep. Exercising for at least 30 minutes three times a week can improve your sleep. So, get moving! Go for a walk or a run. The best time to exercise is in the late afternoon or early evening. Exercising in the morning, while good for you, won't help with sleep. But don't exercise in your sacred 90 minutes before bed, because the stimulation can disturb your sleep!



SEE THE LIGHT...

Make sure you get outside into the daylight during the day, this is essential for your circadian rhythms.

PRACTICE CALMING PRACTICES...

Create beneficial routines during the 90 minutes that you have made sacred. This creates a cue for your body that it's time to sleep.

Use a relaxation practice from above (or one that works for you).

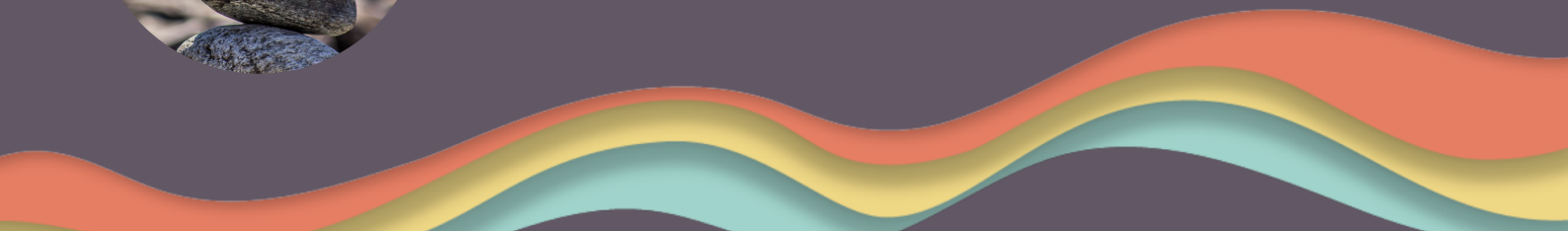
Some other ideas:

- **Journal** – writing for 20 minutes, mindlessly can help to empty the mind. So, if you experience busy brain using this technique can help to settle thoughts. You might want to do this before your relaxation practice.
- **Transition to bed** - put on your pyjamas, brush your teeth, listen to soft music and read on the sofa until you start to feel sleepy and then go to bed.
- **Shut down screens** – put your mobile phone away before the sacred 90 minutes begins, don't watch TV and don't use a computer. Allow yourself quiet, restful space.
- **Have a fixed waking time** - Try to get up at the same time every day, even on weekends, no matter how well you have slept, this helps you to establish a sleeping pattern.
- **Don't get into bed if you are not sleepy!** This will lead to frustration which just won't help.



START SMALL & BE PATIENT...

Sometimes little changes create great outcomes. Introduce changes and create habits from them but be patient as sometimes things get worse before they get better. Stick with it!



LASTLY...



Sleeplessness can be deeply frustrating and the one rule to embed above all others is to roll with it.

If you can't sleep then do some relaxing activities, have a snack and just accept that is the way tonight is; otherwise, you will end up fighting the feelings and the stress of it will take your sleep.

