

NEED SOME HELP COUNTING SHEEP?

Tips for Improving Sleep Hygiene

The Australian Institute of Health and Safety reported in 2018 that the financial cost of insufficient sleep cost the Australian economy \$17.88 billion. Published by Oxford University Press in the journal *SLEEP*, the research found that inadequate sleep is a public health problem affecting more than one in three adults worldwide.

So, what helps?

Good sleep starts with good habits. Here's a few to consider when there is no medical basis for your wakefulness:

Get into a sleep routine. Human bodies generally respond well to routine. Go to bed and get up at more or less the same time every day, even weekends or days off. This regular pattern of sleeping and waking will support your body's rhythm so that it is more responsive to your daily patterns for winding down (sleep time) and winding back up (wake time).

Healthy Diet and Exercise. Regular exercise supports sleep. Likewise, a healthy, balanced diet involving regular (breakfast, lunch and dinner) meals, well-spaced through your day, is also likely to support sleep. See blogs relating to Diet and Exercise.

Avoid caffeine and nicotine. Avoid consuming caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, coke) or nicotine for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. The research tells us that these substances act as stimulants and interfere with the ability to fall asleep.

Avoid Alcohol. Many people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps with sleep, but it actually interferes with the quality of sleep. It is best to avoid alcohol if you're after a good night's sleep

Avoid Naps. Probably not what you want to hear, but it is best to avoid naps through the day so that you are tired at the bedtime you have set as your routine. If you absolutely can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it's for less than an hour and before 3pm.

Bedtime Routines. Bedtime routines are often helpful because it reminds the mind and body that it is now preparing for sleep. They provide a wind down time for disengaging from the day and transitioning into sleep mode. Develop your own bedtime rituals. These might include having a shower/bath, cleaning your teeth, doing a meditation practice, engaging in some relaxing stretches.

Some research indicates the value of a hot bath before bedtime as it raises body temperature and drowsiness ensues from the body temperature drop back down again. Many additional support strategies have been identified by individuals struggling with insomnia. The use of Aromatherapy or Essential Oils, journaling, massage, relaxing instrumental music, weighted blankets, body pillows, calming herbal teas are but a few. Experiment with what works for you.

Bed is for Sleeping. Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex so that your mind comes to associate bed with sleep. If you use bed as a place to watch TV, eat, read, work on your laptop, pay bills etc, your mind will link bed to this activity and that is likely to alert it rather than relax it. So, don't bring your technology into the bedroom (except for a guided meditation/relaxation practice).

The right space. It is important that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. A cooler room with enough blankets to stay warm is best. Curtains or an eye mask can be useful to block out early morning light and the use of earplugs for noise disturbance.

Maintain daytime routines. Even if you have a bad night's sleep, it is important you try to maintain your daytime routine despite feelings of fatigue as structure is settling. In short, don't avoid activities because you feel tired. This can reinforce insomnia.

Busy Minds. After a busy day it can be challenging to switch off the 'thinking' mind preoccupied with solving the problems of the day and preparing for the next. Thinking mode is never helpful for supporting your ability to relax into sleep. Utilising a guided meditation practice that focuses your attention on the body will usually support a 'being' mode of mind to help you move out of thinking.

This strategy may also be helpful if you wake through the night and struggle to get back to sleep. For further support regarding strategies speak with your therapist.

Sweet dreams!