

SLEEP RESOURCE FOR TEENS



About Sleep

Sleep is important for physical health, energy levels, recovering from injuries and illnesses, psychological well-being, mood, concentration, memory, school performance, and getting along with others. We don't really pay attention to our sleep, until we start having problems with it. People need different amounts of sleep; however, most teenagers should aim for 8-10 hours of sleep each night. Teenagers often juggle their need for sleep with other activities such as homework, spending time with friends, and sport and extra-curricular activities. They also have naturally later sleep cycles, which means they get sleepy later in the evening compared to adults, but early school starts don't allow them to sleep in the mornings. It can be tricky, and many teenagers don't get enough sleep, but there are small changes that can be made to get better sleep.

Sleep Tips

At Bedtime:

Get Regular.

Train your body to sleep well by going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day, even on weekends! Even after a late night studying or socialising, you should try and get up close to your normal wake-up time. It will help you get your sleep back on track quickly.

Bath or shower.

There's another bonus of having a hot bath or shower 1-2 hours before bed. It will raise your body temperature initially, but when your body temperature drops soon after, you should start to feel sleepy.

Sleep when sleepy.

Only go to bed when you actually feel tired or sleepy, rather than spending too much time awake in bed. Spending too much time trying to get to sleep can lead to frustration and break the sleep/bed association. Having a bedtime routine should help with this.

Bedtime routine.

Having a bedtime routine helps prepare your body and mind for sleep. A routine can include getting things ready for tomorrow, having a bath or shower, cleaning teeth or doing some gentle stretches. The trick is to do the same routine each day in the hour before bed, so your body learns to associate these activities with bedtime and sleepiness.

Bed is for sleeping.

Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping. This way your body will come to associate bed with sleep and not watching TV, doing homework or trawling social media.

The right environment.

It is very important that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable. A cool room with enough covers to stay warm is best. Make sure you have curtains or an eye mask to block out light and earplugs if your room is noisy.

In Bed:

Get up & try again.

If you haven't been able to get to sleep after about 20 minutes or more, get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy, then return to bed and try again. Avoid doing anything that is too stimulating or interesting, as the point is to wind yourself down.

No clock-watching.

Checking the clock during the night can make you feel stressed about not being able to sleep and the light from the clock will wake you up even more. Turn the clock away from you so you aren't tempted to check it during the night.



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During the day:

No naps.

It is best to avoid taking naps during the day to make sure that you are tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it is for less than an hour and before 3pm. Try a walk outside next time you feel like you need a nap.

Exercise.

Regular exercise is great for sleep as it improves your energy levels during the day and helps you to feel tired at night. Try to avoid anything too strenuous in the 4 hours before bedtime, but after school sport is fine.

Don't cancel plans.

Even if you've had a bad night sleep and feel tired, it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities the same as you had planned. Don't cancel your plans to accommodate your tiredness as this can make it harder to sleep the next night.

Avoid caffeine.

Avoid consuming any caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. They act as stimulants and disrupt sleep.

Eat right.

A healthy, balanced diet will help you to sleep well, but timing is important. A very empty stomach at bedtime can be distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack, but a heavy meal too close to bedtime can also interrupt sleep. Some people find a warm glass of milk can act as a natural sleep inducer.



Challenging unhelpful thoughts about sleep

Sometimes, the thoughts you have about sleep can reinforce your sleep difficulties. Some people find their sleep improves after they identify their unhelpful sleep-related thoughts and challenge these thoughts, replacing them with more realistic ones. Below, we look at some common unhelpful thoughts about sleep, and consider more realistic ways of thinking.

I haven't slept well this past week, it must mean that I have lost the ability to sleep.

Sometimes we assume the worst about the meaning or cause of sleep problems, which is likely to be much more distressing than thinking "I haven't slept well this past week - I might be stressed about something at school or at home, if I address the source of stress my sleep should improve."

I'm not doing a good job because I need more sleep.

Blaming everything on sleep is another common thinking trap. It is true that poor sleep can affect mood, concentration, memory and academic performance, but sleep is not the only cause of problems in these areas. People sometimes assume that their sleep problems are the cause of everything that goes wrong with the day when this is unlikely to be true.

I didn't get a full, uninterrupted 8 hours of sleep last night so I'm going to be ruined for the day.

Unrealistic expectations about how much sleep is needed can make people feel worse about problems with sleeping and cause stress that could interfere with falling asleep the next night. Thinking instead "I didn't sleep well last night, but I can push through today and get some better sleep tonight" is more realistic and helps you get on with things.

I can't remember the last time I had a good night's sleep.

Unhelpful thoughts about sleep that increase stress and anxiety are more likely to prevent, rather than facilitate, a good night's sleep. Remembering only the times you slept poorly and forgetting nights where you slept well, is likely to make bedtime more stressful. Remembering nights where you slept well, can remind us that our sleep isn't always bad, and tonight could be one of the good nights.

What is good sleep?

Good sleepers usually take less than 30 minutes to fall asleep at the beginning of the night and will wake up once or twice during the night. In other words, it is unrealistic to expect to fall asleep immediately on getting into bed or to never wake up at all during the night. Even the best sleepers will have a night now and then when it takes them a long time to get to sleep. This is often triggered by a stressful event and will usually pass after a night or two. Similarly, everybody will have a night now and then when they find it difficult to get back to sleep after waking in the middle of the night.



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Where to go for more help

If your sleep is impacting the quality of your life, your ability to function at school or with friends, and it seems to have been going on for a while and isn't getting better, you should speak to a trusted adult about making an appointment with your doctor. If you think you might be experiencing depression, anxiety or other mental health condition, you should consult a doctor. You can also contact the **Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800** or visit your local Headspace centre, see www.headspace.org.au for locations and online support.