

10 tips to help you sleep

For peak performance, health and well-being





“It’s important to listen to your body and build a routine that gives you the right amount of sleep to keep you happy and healthy”

Healthy sleep is as important to your health and well-being as a good diet and physical activity, so follow these 10 simple steps to build a healthier sleep pattern – from foods to exercise, sunlight to naps.

People who don’t need much sleep are synonymous with success. Historical figures from Leonardo Da Vinci to Winston Churchill are all known for achieving great things while sleeping little.

But attitudes to sleep are shifting. It’s not the enemy of productivity, it’s a key ingredient in the lifestyles of successful people. These days, highly productive people try to sleep more to boost their productivity, wellness, health and focus.

Illness

Sleep isn’t just for resting your body, it’s important for repair and maintenance. A lack of sleep can negatively impact your immune system and make you more prone to illness. A study by the University of California shows that you’re 4.2 times more likely to catch a cold if you tend to get less than six hours’ sleep a night.¹

Mental health

A lack of sleep can also have a big impact on mental health playing a role in depression, anxiety and moodiness. A lack of sleep can increase anxiety levels by 30 percent, according to another study by the University of California at Berkley.^{2,3}

Bad behaviour

Sleep is also important for creativity, focus and management of emotions, and without enough, we can become less cooperative, more selfish and less inclined to behave ethically. The University of Pennsylvania found that subjects who were limited to 4.5 hours' sleep a night for one week reported feeling more stressed, angry, sad and mentally exhausted compared with their normal 7 to 8 hours' sleep a night.^{4,5}

Impairments

[One study](#) found that moderate sleep deprivation produces impairments equivalent to those of alcohol intoxication, so the combination of sleeplessness and driving is as serious as driving under the influence of alcohol. Research by the U.S. Department of Transportation found that people who have slept for less than seven hours in the past 24 hours have the greatest odds of being involved in a car accident.⁶

Everybody's sleep need is different – we don't all need eight hours a night. The number of hours we need to stay healthy is influenced by our genes as well as our lifestyle and it can change over the course of time. This is why it's important to listen to your body and build a routine that gives you the right amount of sleep to keep you happy and healthy.

Small changes can have a big impact and this advice from sleep specialist [Dr Michael Breus](#) of the [American Board of Sleep Medicine](#) will help you build your optimal sleep pattern.

1. Know yourself

If you are constantly tired and/or feel that you're not getting enough sleep, see a doctor who will be able to diagnose (or refer you for diagnosis) sleep disorders such as periodic limb movements, sleep apnoea and snoring. Once diagnosed, they will be able to help you build a healthy sleep pattern.



2. Test the bedtime theory

The National Sleep Foundation has a [Bedtime Calculator](#) that can help you define what time you should go to bed. It asks you what time you wake up, how much sleep you want and when you want to go to bed. Based on the fact that the average sleep cycle is 90 minutes and that the average individual has five sleep cycles per night, it counts backwards by 7.5 hours to define when you should go to bed. Try the experiment for a week and see if you feel better for it.

3. Be consistent

The more consistent you are, the more your circadian rhythm stays undisturbed so try and keep to the same wake-up time every day – even weekends! Studies show that if the brain *knows* when to sleep, it goes to sleep faster and goes in to deep sleep faster resulting in better sleep that means you might even need less of it.



4. Regulate your caffeine

Caffeine has a half-life of six to eight hours so try and stop drinking caffeinated drinks such as coke and coffee by 2 or 3pm. This will mean that half of it is out of your system by 10pm, enabling you to sleep properly.



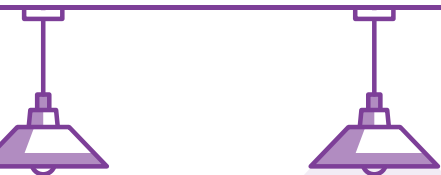
5. Regulate your alcohol

Alcohol is used as the number one sleep aid in the world. Unfortunately, while it makes you sleepy, the sleep you get with alcohol in your system is less restorative. It takes an hour to process one unit of alcohol so try and avoid having any in your system before bed.



6. Exercise

Exercise is the best possible way to improve the quality of your sleep. [20-30 minutes](#) works well and even a brisk walk counts. Exercise too close to bedtime can result in trouble sleeping, so try not to exercise within four hours of lights out. [One study](#) found that 70 percent of people who exercise three times a week experience 'very good sleep' compared to only 13.8 percent who exercise less than once a week.

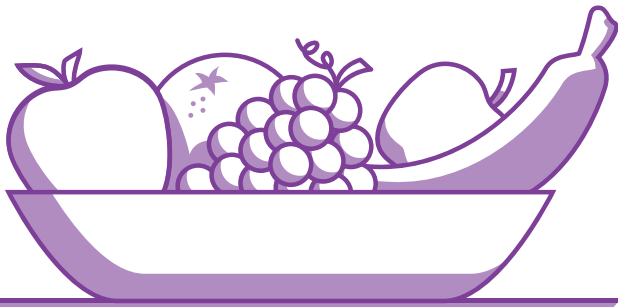


7. See the light

Direct sunlight or other light for 15 minutes within 30 minutes of waking up helps to reset and maintain the health of your circadian rhythm. In particular seek out lightbulbs that emit blue light which helps turn off the brain's 'go to sleep' chemical (melatonin), preventing grogginess and fuzziness. As such, avoid blue light at night (including laptops and phones). You can often change the 'tone' from blue to amber in your phone's settings. You can also wear blue-blocker glasses or download the [scientifically validated](#) app [F.lux](#), for computers.

8. Strategic napping!

Strategic napping can be a great boost to performance when done correctly but be careful: longer naps at the wrong time can have the reverse effect. If you're an 'early bird' – up at 6-7am you may want to nap around 1:30, whereas late risers may have their natural lull around 2-3pm. A seven-minute micro nap can help improve performance by nine percent while a full [26-minute 'power nap'](#) can improve it by 30 percent.



9. Eat healthy

A healthy balanced diet is likely to be one that aids healthy sleep: lots of fruit, vegetables and unprocessed meat and fish. To get sleep promoting chemicals such as tryptophan, magnesium and calcium, eat bananas, dark greens, meat, fish, nuts, whole grains, beans and lentils, fruit, and dairy. Avoid high-sugar, high-carbohydrate and heavily-processed foods.

10. Screen shut-off

A [2016 study](#) on the relationship between smartphone screen time and sleep confirmed that screen time is associated with poor sleep. “Longer average screen times during bedtime and the sleeping period were associated with poor sleep quality, decreased sleep efficiency, and longer sleep onset latency.” In other words, screen time before sleep means it takes longer for you to fall asleep. The study also observed that “poor sleep may lead to increased screen-time. However, exposure to smartphone screens, particularly around bedtime, may negatively impact sleep.” So, keeping screen-time to a minimum around bedtime would seem to be a healthy sleep hygiene habit to adopt.⁷

More support when you need it

We understand the role of sleep in your health and happiness. That’s why we’ve created a suite of resources to help members build healthy lifestyles – from diet, sleep and exercise to the management of chronic conditions.

- Log in to our members’ [Health Hub](#) and contact the CARE team to take advantage of some healthy behaviours coaching support.
- Ask your employer about whether you’re eligible to access Wellness Webinars through your Aetna International group plan.

- To access our Employee Assistance Program (EAP), for support with ‘life admin’ from counselling, help finding local childcare to financial or legal advice, log in to the [Health Hub](#). You can also call the member services number on the back of your member ID card for more information or download the iConnectYou app.

These benefits are designed to help members live well and feel better, support you with lifestyle-related conditions, offer guidance from our expert clinicians and even stay productive while taking care of personal issues.

1 <https://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/health/sleep-leads-sickness-study-article-1.2344483>

2 https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/poor-sleep-can-be-the-cause-of-anxiety-study-finds/2018/11/09/9180ea10-e366-11e8-ab2c-b31dcd53ca6b_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e0efc47b7daf

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8rpaCSm708>

4 <http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/need-sleep/whats-in-it-for-you/mood>

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8rpaCSm708>

6 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/are-you-sleep-deprived-watch-out-for-risk-of-car-crashes/articleshow/65865052.cms>

7 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27829040>



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