

Sleep hygiene

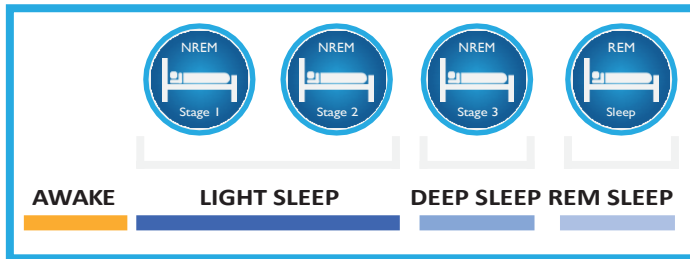


Occupational Therapy Health Promotion Groups

What do we know about sleep?

Falling asleep is a natural, unforced process whereby the body and mind wind down until sleep occurs. We become unconscious, unaware of what's going on around us.

The body moves through different stages of sleep from light to deeper sleep. This happens in cycles, moving up and down the stages several times during the night. During each stage, very important processes take place that restore the body in preparation for a new day. These include tissue regeneration, immune system strengthening, metabolism, memory, learning and other vital functions.



There are two main stages of sleep:

- **Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep** comes and goes throughout the night, and makes up about one fifth of your sleep. Your brain is very active. Your eyes move quickly from side to side and you dream. Your muscles are very relaxed.
- **Non-REM sleep**- your brain is quiet. You are still unconscious but your body moves around more. Hormones are released into the blood-stream and your body repairs itself after the wear and tear of the day.

Did you know...

On a normal night, most people wake up for one or two minutes every 2 hours or so. You aren't usually aware of these 'mini wakes', but may remember them if you feel anxious or there is something else going on (noises outside, a partner snoring).



How much sleep do I need?

This mainly depends on your age.

Babies sleep for about **17 hours each day**.

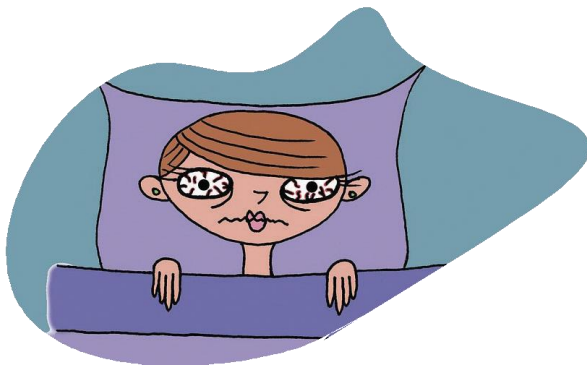
Older children only need **9 or 10 hours each night**.

Most **adults** need around **8 hours sleep each night**.

Older people need the same amount of sleep, **but will often only have one period of deep sleep during the night**, usually in the first 3 or 4 hours. After that, they wake more easily. **We tend to dream less as we get older**.

Even so, we are all different, even people who are the same age as us.

Most of us will need 8 hours a night, but some (a few) people can get by with only 3 hours a night



But I never sleep...

The short periods when you are awake (every couple of hours) can feel much longer than they really are. So you can feel that you are not getting as much sleep as you really are.

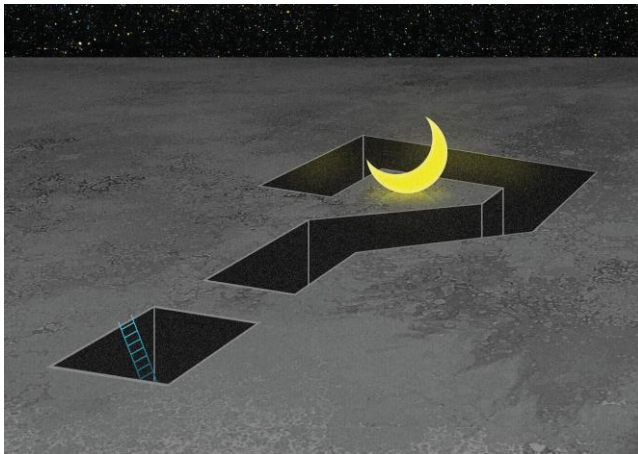
What happens if I don't sleep?

The occasional night without sleep will make you feel tired the next day, but it won't affect your health.

However, after several sleepless nights, you will start to find that you:

- Feel tired all the time
- Drop off during the day
- Find it difficult to concentrate
- Find it hard to make decisions
- Start to feel depressed
- Start to worry about not being able to sleep.

This can be very **dangerous** if you are driving or operating heavy machinery. Lack of sleep can make you more likely to get **high blood pressure, diabetes and to be overweight.**



You may feel that you aren't getting enough sleep or that, even if you do get the hours, you just aren't getting a good night's rest.

There are many everyday reasons for not sleeping well:

- Bedroom too noisy
- Bed may be uncomfortable or too small
- You aren't getting enough exercise
- You go to bed hungry- and wake up too early
- Illness, pain or a high temperature
- Difficulties at work
- Depression- you wake very early and can't get back to sleep as you are thinking over and over about problems- usually without getting anywhere with them.
- Too hot or too cold
- Lack of a regular sleep routine
- Eating too late- and find it hard to get off to sleep
- Cigarettes, alcohol and drinks containing caffeine (such as tea and coffee)
- Emotional problems
- Anxiety and worry

What is sleep hygiene then?

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have a normal, quality night's sleep and increase daytime alertness. Sleep hygiene is important for everyone, no matter their age, in order to promote healthy sleep and daytime alertness. Good sleep hygiene can also prevent the development of sleep disorders such as insomnia.



How is my sleep right now?

(Take a few notes if you want)

How to improve your sleep

Here are some practical tips:

During the day:

- **Avoid napping** as this is likely to interfere with your usual bedtime. Particularly avoid napping in the evening
- **Avoid taking drinks which contain caffeine within four hours of bedtime.** Caffeine containing drinks are stimulants which can prevent you from falling asleep. Examples of caffeine containing drinks are: tea, coffee and cola. Chocolate also contains caffeine

- **Avoid drinking alcohol at night.** Although you may feel this helps you sleep it will cause sleep disturbance in the later half of the night, which may result in you feeling un-refreshed in the morning
- Try to **exercise regularly.** Vigorous or strenuous exercise can be done in the morning or early afternoon. Light relaxing exercise such as yoga can be done in the evening, but ideally not within two hours of bedtime
- **Avoid heavy meals just before bedtime but don't go to bed with an empty stomach.** If you have dietary problems, don't experiment with foods in the evening.

At night:

- Make sure your **bed is comfortable** and reserve bed for sleep or sexual activities only. **Avoid watching television in bed and also avoid using the computer before bedtime**
- Ensure you are able to **block out noise and light from your bedroom** (e.g. blackout blinds or curtains). You can also use ear plugs or eye shields
- Make sure your **room is not too hot or too cold**
- During the evening, **set aside a period to deal with your worries, make a list of things you can tackle the next day**
- Before you go to bed try to keep to a **routine such as taking a warm bath, drinking a milky drink and using deep breathing exercises or relaxation tapes**
- **Only go to bed when you are sleepy**

- If you cannot fall asleep within 15 minutes, **get out of bed and sit quietly in another room with dim light until you feel sleepy again**. You can do some light reading but **do not use the computer or watch television**
- If you wake in the middle of the night and cannot get back to sleep try to do the same.



What should I do if these do not work for me?

- **Keep a diary of your sleep pattern over two weeks.** You need to record the time you went to bed and the time you think you have slept
- You also need to **record the times you have had tea and coffee and take medication or exercise.** The diary should be dated and include whether the day is a work day or a day off work.

This may alert you to improvements you can make.