



Sleep

Most adults require between 7 and 9 hours sleep per night, although individuals vary greatly on how much sleep they need to function well. Disrupted sleep is often one of the first signs of emotional distress and can take the form of an inability to fall asleep, restlessness, nightmares, frequent waking, or a combination of all of these. Regular lack of sleep can contribute to irritability, anxiety and depression. Therefore, getting enough sleep is an important factor in coping with distress. Below are some tips for improving sleep.

Develop a consistent sleep routine

Routines help tell your body it is time for sleep. An example of a sleep routine might be spending the hour before bed winding down, have a protein snack, brush teeth, get into pyjamas, read, listen to relaxation track, listen to sleep music and then fall asleep. Try having dinner and going to bed at roughly the same time each night. Most people sleep better if they fall asleep before 11pm.

Relaxation

Winding down and reducing stress is an important part of preparing for sleep. Having a bath, doing something you enjoy in the evening, or try doing a meditation or yoga at the end of the day. You can download my 25 minute progressive muscle relaxation audio track at www.livewellnow.com.au/client-resources . Listening to classical or relaxation music whilst sleeping can assist in relaxing the mind and body. Reading before bed can also help take your mind off worries.

Exercise

Regular exercise is important for good health and stress management. Even as little as 20 minutes of exercise 3 to 5 times per week can increase feelings of happiness, reduce stress and promote optimum body functioning. The best time to exercise to help with sleep is in the late afternoon or in the morning. Avoid exercising within 4 hours of going to bed as exercise increases our body temperature which is not conducive to sleep.

Focus the mind

Many people find that it is when lying in bed trying to get to sleep that feelings and worries tend to come to the surface. Writing down your worries or things that need doing the next day so that you do not have to keep going over them can help ease your mind. Counting is one way of focusing the mind away from our problems and worries. Try counting backwards in time with your breath. Imagine you are walking down a stairwell as you count backwards and with each step your body is getting heavier and you are getting more relaxed. You can also download and try my “Getting Back to Sleep” audio Track at www.livewellnow.com.au/client-resources .

Natural sleep remedies

Lavender oil– put some lavender oil on a handkerchief and place on your pillow at bedtime

Chamomile and green tea have both been shown to have calming effects

Valerian – commonly used for insomnia but works best over a period of time therefore you will need to take this one hour before bed for at least 3 weeks to gain the most benefit. About 10% of the population become more alert after taking valerian. If this is you, try taking it during the day instead.

Magnesium and calcium – magnesium deficiency has been linked to poor sleep. Supplements are available from health food shops or you can increase your intake of magnesium rich foods such as green leafy vegetables, wheat germ, pumpkin seeds, and almonds. Magnesium salts can also be used in a bath.

Sleep and stress herbal blends can be purchased from any good health food shop.

Things to avoid

Caffeine, especially after 4pm, try a herbal tea instead.

Sweet food, such as chocolate, confectionery and desserts, especially close to bedtime. Try a protein snack such as some nuts, a boiled egg, cheese, yoghurt or glass of warm milk before bed instead.

Watching TV or using electronic devices in bed. Turn off all mobile phones and electronic devices before getting into bed. Ensure all notifications are switched off if you require the phone on.