

# STRATEGIES FOR GETTING A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP

## Tip SHEET

*We all sleep. We all need sleep. Sleep is a well-recognised component of our health yet some of us don't seem to be able to get enough.*

Whether you get snappy and irritable or, giggly and delirious – lack of sleep affects us all. Longer term the effects of not getting adequate sleep can be far more serious than feeling a bit out of sorts. Sleep is an essential part of our health alongside fitness and nutrition but until recently it hasn't had the attention or respect that it deserves. Whether you keep regular office hours or do shift work, it is important to prioritise sleep and try to get as many ZZZZ's as you can.

### WHY DO WE NEED SLEEP?

Researchers are still asking that question but what we do know is that it's not a time in which the mind and body shut down. Sleep is a very active period in which a great deal of important processing, restoration and strengthening occurs. Our brains will process new knowledge and consolidate memories, while the rest of our body grows muscle, repairs tissue and synthesises and regulates hormones. There are known benefits for our immune system as well.

Sleep is like a temporary road closure, when work is done to repair and upgrade your systems.

Speaking of roads, there are other risks of not getting enough sleep. Accidents in the car and at work are increased when there is reduced sleep. Anxiety and depression, or at least low mood and increased agitation, can be triggered by poor sleep. Depleted energy, sleepiness, and increased tension may be largely to blame.

The hormones that are involved in blood sugar regulation as well as weight regulation can be affected by inadequate sleep. The hormones that make us feel hungry and full can be disrupted and go a bit haywire, so better sleep can lead to better weight management. Heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and even Alzheimer's have had clear links to inadequate sleep and there are increased risks of developing these conditions if there is long term, chronic, untreated sleep deprivation.

### HOW MUCH SLEEP DO WE NEED?

Well that varies of course from person to person, it's like saying that

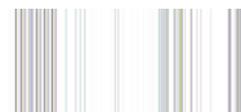
everyone should be 70kg, there are many individual differences. Generally speaking adults in Australia should aim to get 7-8 hours per night. Some may need more, some less. Children and adolescents need more sleep. As a broad guideline the National Sleep Foundation in the USA recommend the following:

- Newborns (0-3 months) need between 14-17 hours of sleep per day.
- Infants (4-11 months) need 12-15 hours per day.
- Toddlers (1-2 years) need 11-14 hours
- Preschoolers (aged 3-5): need 10-13 hours
- School age children (aged 6-13): need 9-11 hours
- Teenagers (aged 14-17): need 8-10 hours
- Younger adults (18-25): need 7-9 hours
- Adults (26-64): need 7-8 hours
- Older adults (65+): Sleep range is 7-8 hours

It can be hard to know how much sleep you need. You can begin by assessing your own individual needs and habits and just see how you respond to different amounts of sleep. Pay careful attention to your mood, energy and health after a poor night's sleep versus a good one. Ask yourself, "How often do I get a good night's sleep?" Like good diet and exercise, sleep is a critical component to overall health, and changes will take weeks and months, they won't necessarily be immediate.

We know that in a random sample across the community in 2017, 40% of Australians reported that they didn't get enough sleep. Half of these difficulties were due to poor habits, or work/study/family pressures and the other half were due to an actual problem with their sleep, and the most common problem is a racing mind that just won't turn off!

All of this may sound a bit depressing, but the good news is most of the issues associated with sleep deprivation are quite easily modifiable. It is important to reflect on your sleep and check if you're getting enough. Please reach out to Converge International for support should you need a bit of a helping hand to improve your



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sleep quality and quantity. We have Nutrition and Lifestyle experts on hand and we are happy to help get you back to sleep and loving your bed again!

### 10 TIPS TO GETTING A BETTER NIGHTS SLEEP

#### 1. Have a regular sleep pattern

Try to go to bed at around the same time every day and get up at around the same time if you can. Improved sleep will not happen as soon as changes are made. But if good sleep habits are maintained, sleep will certainly get better. Find what time works for you and stick with it, working around your work schedule.

#### 2. Spend the right amount of time in bed

Most adults need about 7 to 8 hours sleep every 24 hour period. Some require more and some less. Many poor sleepers spend much more than 8 hours in bed and this makes fragmented sleep a habit. Except if you have lengthy sleep requirements, limit your time in bed to no more than 8.5 hours. If you often take hours to fall asleep, go to bed later. Remember that children need more sleep than adults.

#### 3. Bed is for sleeping, not entertainment

Hand-held electronic devices (e.g., smartphones) and other distractions can interfere with your sleep. It is better not to sleep with your TV or other devices on. Your mind needs to be in the habit of knowing that if you are in bed, you are there to sleep. Don't stay in bed if you are wide awake. Get up and try again later when sleepy.

#### 4. Wind down and relax before going to bed

Have a buffer zone before bedtime. Sort out any problems well before going to bed. This may mean setting aside a 'worry time' during the day. Use this time to go over the day's activities and work out a plan of action for the next day. Try to avoid using your computer or other electronic screens within 1-2 hours of bedtime. Find a relaxation technique that works for you and practise it regularly, during your wind down period.

#### 5. Make sure your bedroom is comfortable

You should have a quiet, dark room with comfortable bedding and good temperature control.

#### 6. Alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes – to be avoided

Alcohol may help you to get off to sleep, but will disrupt your sleep during the night. Caffeine (tea, coffee, cola drinks) and the nicotine

in cigarettes are stimulants that can keep you awake. Limit your intake.

#### 7. Don't lie awake watching the clock

Watching the time on a clock just makes you anxious about not being asleep. If possible, take the clock out of your bedroom. Resist the temptation to look at the time on your various electronic devices. These should ideally be charged outside of the bedroom overnight.

#### 8. Avoid sleeping pills except in exceptional circumstances

They do not fix the cause of your sleeping problem. Use intermittently or very short term.

#### 9. Get plenty of light

Depending on when you want to sleep, you can use light to your advantage. At the end of your sleep (in the morning for office hours workers) get plenty of natural daylight and avoid light in the evening when you want to get some sleep. This use of light will be at different times of the 24hour period, depending upon your work-sleep schedule.

#### 10. You may need professional help

If you are still having trouble sleeping, if you have persistent problems with mood, if you have excessive daytime sleepiness, restlessness in bed, severe snoring or wakening unrefreshed despite what should be adequate length sleep, make sure that you go and see your GP.

### GETTING SUPPORT

The Converge International Employee Assistance Program is there to support you and your mental fitness. Our experienced counsellors work closely with organisations and their employees during times of need.

You might find it useful to have a sounding board, someone you can speak with, who can listen to your concerns around issues you may be facing, as well as offer you support to take proactive steps to better manage your sleep.

