Everyone has trouble sleeping at some point. Poor sleep can affect your judgement, your ability to concentrate and focus and can have a negative impact on your mood. This can make it hard to study and perform at your best.

**Understanding sleep**

Some people are more prone to sleep disturbances than others. Sometimes there may be no obvious reason for sleep changes. At other times, specific situations can cause changes in sleep patterns. For example, stress can cause disturbing dreams or make your thoughts race when you are trying to sleep.

Although there is no magic cure for sleep problems, there are several things you can do to increase the likelihood that you will have an adequate amount of good quality sleep.

Most adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night. During sleep, our brains are active, helping to reenergize the body’s cells, clear waste from the brain, and supporting learning and memory consolidation.

There are two main types of sleep: rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-REM sleep (which has 3 different stages). People cycle through all stages of sleep several times during the night, with longer, deeper REM periods occurring toward morning. The human ‘body clock’ is a 24-hour cycle of hormones (circadian rhythm) giving us energy through the day and allowing us to relax and sleep at night.

Re-establishing a routine to strengthen the ‘body clock’ cycle can be a powerful way to improve sleep. This means that we need to be active during the day and encourage rest at night. Developing new sleep habits takes time so perseverance is a necessary part of getting back on track.

**Your body**

Our body responds to the things we consume and are exposed to in the lead up to bed time.

- Minimise use of caffeine, cigarettes, chocolate, stimulants and other medications, particularly in the evening. Alcohol also interferes with sleep cycles.
- If you find yourself waking in the night to use the bathroom, try and reduce fluid intake in the hours before going to bed.
- Keep lights low toward bedtime, as bright lights (including computer screens and phones) make it harder for your brain to produce melatonin, the natural sedative which helps us sleep.
- Avoid heavy meals before bed. If you need a snack, a drink of milk may be helpful.
- Many people find relaxation exercises and meditation helpful to relax both the body and the mind. Apps such as Headspace, Smiling Mind and Calm have sleep playlists. Alternatively, you can download audio files from The Desk or Oxygen Youth Health. Avoid watching meditation videos on YouTube as looking at a screen interferes with sleep.
Your environment
There are simple things you can do to make your surroundings more conducive of sleep:

- Make sure your bedroom is an uncluttered, relaxing and soothing place that creates a restful mood. Try to use your bed for sleep and intimacy only (not study) and put your study materials out of sight when you are lying in bed.
- Your bedroom should be not too warm or too cold, and needs to be quiet and dark or only dimly lit. You’ll sleep best with some fresh air and a comfortable bed and pillow.
- If you have a partner who disturbs your sleep through snoring or movement, you may need to negotiate some changed sleeping arrangements. If you live in noisy accommodation, consider trying earplugs.
- Remove the clock from your room or face it away so you can’t watch the time ticking by.

Your mind
- If you have a busy mind, write down things to do the next day so you know they are safely recorded, and you can relax and sleep.
- Set aside ‘worry time’ earlier in the day if you need it. You can write your thoughts in a diary or talk them over with someone. ‘Worry Time’ involves setting aside 20 minutes each day where you allow yourself to think about the day’s events and what is happening tomorrow. You can write down what you are worried about, and what you might do to help resolve the problem. At the end of the time, tell yourself the Worry Time is up, that it is now time to rest and that you will have another chance to worry tomorrow. Record any outstanding issues for tomorrow’s Worry Time.
- Shift your focus. It can be frustrating to not be able to sleep, making you more stressed and then less likely to sleep. Plan on getting some rest and relaxing rather than ‘trying to get to sleep’.
- Some people find it helpful to concentrate their thoughts upon something simple but boring, such as counting backwards from 500. It’s important to make sure your breathing is slow and your body relaxed while you do this. Listening to relaxation exercises and meditation audios can also help.
- If you wake through the night and feel unsettled after a bad dream, doing something a little different can help you switch back into a relaxed mode. For example, turning your pillow over to the cool side can be refreshing, or get up for a short time until you feel calm and safe again. Thinking of a positive ending to the dream’s story can help, especially with recurring dreams.
- Accept that there will be nights when you cannot sleep as well as you would like. You will still be able to function the next day. The less anxious you are about sleep, the more easily sleep will come to you.

Your routines and habits
- Get up at the same time each morning, regardless of whether you are still sleepy. If you have trouble falling asleep at night, sleeping in will only shift your sleep-wake cycle and exacerbate the problem. The only way to change such a sleep time routine is to start with waking at the required time.
- If you tend to snooze your alarm, consider putting it out of reach. Then you will have to get out of bed to turn it off and it is easier to then start your day. Alternatively, you could try a puzzle alarm app that requires you to complete a puzzle to switch your alarm off.
- When you wake, get up, be active, preferably go outside into the sunlight and do some physical activity, such as walking. This prompts the brain to become alert.
- Try not to nap during the day as this will reduce tiredness and impact your sleep that night.
- Be physically active during the day, but not close to bedtime.
- Have a calming routine before bed. This signals to your body and mind to prepare to sleep. Go to bed at a similar time each night and do something easy and relaxing for an hour or so before bed. Turn the lights down low and limit screen time (phone and TV). Instead you might read a book, listen to music, or have a bath. It is important to stop studying and do something relaxing before trying to sleep.
- It is best not to go to bed too early. You might notice feeling tired in waves. Go to bed when you are tired and ready to sleep.
- If you find you have not fallen asleep within around 20 minutes of going to bed, get up again. Keep the lights low. Write some thoughts down or a to-do list and let yourself know you will return to those thoughts in the morning. Read, or have a hot or
cold drink (non-caffeinated). Return to bed when you feel sleepy.

- Using a sleep diary can help you identify what might be causing your sleep problems and help you identify what strategies help. A version of a sleep diary can be found on the next page.

### Audio downloads

Visit the Desk (free to students) at thedesk.org.au. Download the Abdominal breathing or Progressive Muscle Relaxation track under tools and relaxation.

Orygen Youth Health has a range of resources. Download the Breathing exercise, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and The Beach track by visiting https://pyh.org.au/our-services/training-resources/free-downloads-youth-menthal-health-resources/pause

### Apps for your device

**Calm.** This app has been designed for sleep, meditation and relaxation. This is a great mindfulness app for beginners through to advanced users.

**Headspace.** Sleep by Headspace can be found within the Headspace app. It includes everything from meditation, to nature sounds and even music for sleep.

**Smiling Mind.** Designed by psychologists and educators to bring mindfulness into your life.

### Where can I get more information or help?

The Sleep Health Foundation: www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Information and resources about a range of sleep issues including sleep disorders, nightmares, shift work and daytime sleepiness.

### University Counselling Service

utas.edu.au/counselling

Free personal counselling (face-to-face, video, phone, instant chat and email) appointments are available with experienced mental health clinicians between 8.30am and 5.00pm weekdays.

Online bookings: utas.edu.au/appointments

Phone: 1800 817 675

If you need to talk to someone during the night, After Hours Crisis counselling support is available to you. Phone 1300 511 709 or text 0488 884 168.

If sleep disturbance is severe and/or prolonged, consult your general medical practitioner. Your doctor can help investigate any medical causes of your sleep difficulties. In some cases, short-term use of medication may assist with re-establishing a normal sleep pattern. Alternatively, there are many herbal preparations which are readily available.
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<th>Day</th>
<th>Monday</th>
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<td>Naps?</td>
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<td>Caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes</td>
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<td>Mood (e.g. stressed, depressed, happy)</td>
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<td>Exercise (e.g. when, what activity)</td>
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<td>Bedtime routine (e.g. reading, relaxation, using electronics, shower)</td>
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<td>Awake during the night</td>
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<td>Waking time</td>
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<td>Rest score 0-10 (least-most rested)</td>
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<td>Sleep was disturbed by... (e.g. stress, noise, dreams, study, watching TV, on phone)</td>
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<td>Strategies used for sleep. Did they help?</td>
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