

Sleep Smart

Good quality sleep is crucial to mental and physical health. On limited sleep there is no question we are anxious, unproductive and grumpy!

Increasingly research is also demonstrating that insufficient sleep means we have a harder time losing weight and are more prone to cardiovascular disease and other stress related conditions. It seems that sleep is right up there along with nutrition and exercise in determining the state of our health and wellbeing.

So perhaps we should give it more attention than many of us do?

The 5 Stages of Sleep

Stage 1: This very short drowsy stage of 5-10 minutes is when you feel yourself drifting off, often experiencing muscular twitching or a feeling of 'falling'.

Stage 2: In this light sleep stage your temperature drops and your heart rate slows as your body prepares to enter deep sleep.

Stages 3 to 4: This restorative deep sleep stage is characterised by the production of very slow delta brain waves. 50% of your sleep time is spent in deep sleep which is important because this is the time growth and repair hormones are released into the bloodstream.

Stage 5: Also known as REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep this stage is when your brain is most active – problem solving, being creative and dreaming. REM sleep occurs about 90 minutes into a sleep cycle and is crucial for good health.

As you sleep through the night you cycle around the stages several times, extending the length of the REM stage as the night progresses. Generally an average sleep cycle takes about 90 minutes.

#FitnessFact

Anything less than five minutes to fall asleep at night means you're sleep deprived. The ideal is between 10 and 15 minutes.

FAQs

How much sleep is enough? People vary in the amount they need to function well but it is generally accepted that around 7½ to 8 hours of sleep is required for most adults. Children and teenagers naturally need more as they have serious growing to be done.

Is it true inadequate sleep leads to weight gain? Yes! If you haven't had enough sleep your body slows down the production of leptin (the 'hunger hormone' that tells us when we are full). As leptin levels decrease, the brain gets an inaccurate message that you are hungry and need food.

What is the ideal bedroom temperature? Your bedroom is better to be cooler as a drop in body temperature signals the time for sleep. Around 18 degrees is generally considered a good temperature.

What is good preparation last thing at night for getting quality sleep? Anything that serves to relax and calm you – a warm bath, a non-caffeinated drink, (like herbal tea or milk) soft music or reading.

Should I nap if I have a bad nights sleep? A short nap of 15-20 minutes can improve productivity by as much as 30%, so don't feel guilty if you can squeeze in a 'nana nap' during the day. Between 1-3pm is the ideal nap time as this is when most people experience the typical circadian rhythm dip.

What if I can't sleep, should I get up? See if you can figure out why you aren't sleeping? Is it physical discomfort or is something on your mind? If it is the latter, instead of mulling it over or trying to remember something, have a pen and paper by your bed and write things down. If you are lying awake for more than 40 minutes it makes sense to get up and distract yourself with something – a cup of tea or light reading for example.

For more information visit
synergyfitness.co.nz
or talk to one of our training professionals





Successful Sleep Strategies:

- **Do invest in a good bed.** You will spend a third of your life in it, therefore it needs to be comfortable. Likewise check your pillows and renew them regularly.
- **Do take preventative measures** if your partner is affecting your sleep – get a bigger bed, use separate duvets, ask them to seek help for their snoring or use ear plugs!
- **Do darken your room as much as possible.** Light tells your brain that you should be awake and you stop producing melatonin (the natural sleep hormone) as a result. Even tiny amounts of man-made or LED light can affect this. The LED light of computers, TV controls, kindles, i-phones, rechargers and alarms can therefore all disrupt sleep. Use an eye mask if you can't afford heavier curtains. If you get up to go to the bathroom in the night try not to turn the light on.
- **Do get exposure to natural daylight during the day** as experiencing light and dark are key to setting your natural 24-hour circadian rhythm.
- **Do wind down** with some meditation, gentle stretching, light reading or a warm bath in the last hour before bed.
- **Do go to bed earlier** rather than sleep in to catch up. Plan your bedtime routine and try to keep it consistent i.e., if you need to be up at 6am, to get 7½ hours sleep you should be drifting off by 10.30 so don't start some mammoth task at 10.15pm!
- **Don't over-indulge in alcohol to help you sleep.** Whilst it may assist you in relaxing and 'crashing out' more than a glass or two will prevent you getting either deep or REM sleep.
- **Don't rely on sleeping pills long-term if you can help it.** They can be a useful interim measure but, like alcohol, they prevent you getting to the stages of sleep that do you most good.
- **Don't drink too much caffeine too late in the day.** It may surprise you to know that six hours following a coffee or other caffeine-rich beverage over half of the caffeine is still in your system.
- **Don't consume high sugar foods in the evening.** This will cause your blood sugars to rise and your body to produce cortisol – a fat storage hormone.
- **Don't work on your computer last thing at night** and if it has to be set up in the bedroom, cover the screen and any lights with a cloth.
- **Don't exercise strenuously close to bedtime.** This will release adrenaline and tell the body to wake up.
- **Don't allow pets on your bed** and discourage children from sleeping with you if it is affecting your sleep patterns.
- **Don't check your emails or use the internet in bed.** The blue light from the screens is blue sky to your brain and we tend to be awake under blue sky.