

HOW TO SLEEP WELL



mindapples
BITESIZE

What sleep is, why we need it, and how to get enough of it

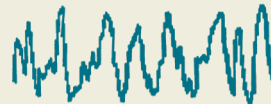
WHY WE SLEEP

Sleep is your life support system, allowing your body to repair and recharge. It can boost your immune system, regulate your metabolism and appetite, aid digestion and lower your blood pressure. It is even linked to life expectancy.

What is less well known is how sleep benefits our minds. Deep NREM sleep is important for memory and learning, filing away the day's memories in long term storage. Lighter REM sleep may play a role in emotional intelligence, giving your mind time to work through experiences and process emotions better.

Sleep is nature's best strategy for mental and physical success - and what's more, it's free.

Humans need two different kinds of sleep: **NREM sleep**, in which our minds shut down and do deep processing and repair work, and **REM sleep**, in which we dream.



NREM sleep
(deep sleep)

Shuts down the mind
No rapid eye movements
Slowed brainwaves
Memory processing
Deep sleep



REM sleep
(dreaming sleep)

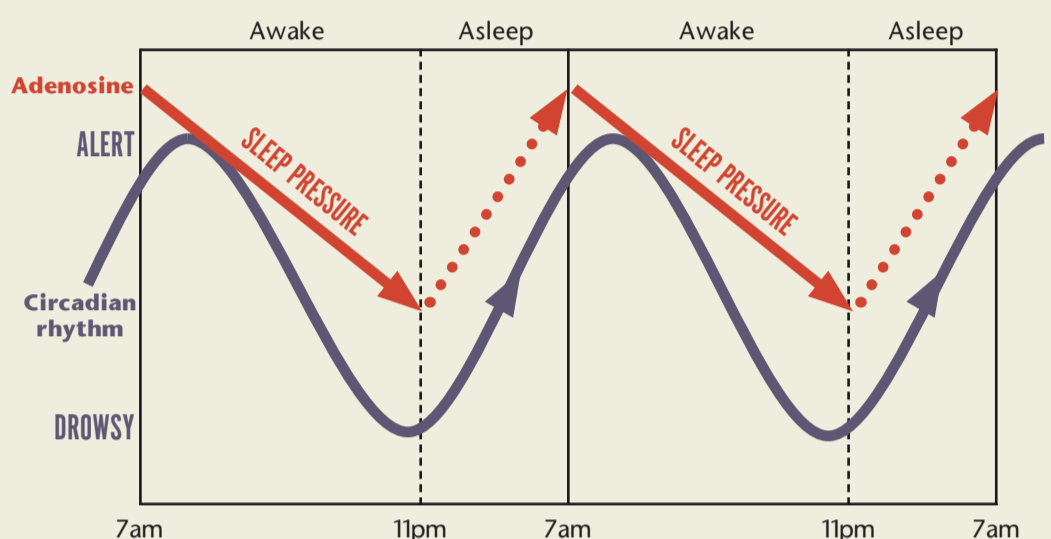
Shuts down the body
Rapid eye movements
Waking brainwaves
Emotional processing
Lighter sleep



HOW TO SLEEP

To improve your sleep, you need to understand the sleep cycle.

Your sleep routine is shaped by two different urges: an urge to wake up, driven by your circadian rhythm which tracks daylight, and an urge to sleep, driven by adenosine which tracks when you last slept.



What stops you sleeping?

Going without sleep is bad for our minds. Sleep deprivation has similar effects to being drunk, slowing our reactions and making it harder to process information. On average, adults need 7-9 hours sleep every night, but one third of adults say they get less than that.

Your home environment can stop you sleeping. Unpredictable noises will disturb your sleep, since your mind is always slightly aware of things around you. Being too hot or cold can also affect sleep, so try to stay comfortable. Avoid electronic devices before bed too, as the light they emit can wake your mind up.

Two of the biggest causes of insomnia are stress and anxiety, which create a heightened vigilance in your mind, readying you to tackle threats and watch for potential dangers. It is hard to sleep when your mind is on high alert.

That includes worrying about getting to sleep! If you can't sleep, try not to lose sleep over it.

What helps you sleep?

Many of the things that help you sleep happen during the day. If you get plenty of daylight, this regulates your circadian rhythm and helps you feel drowsy at night. Taking exercise early in the day can help get your system going, reduce stress and help you relax at bedtime.

A good routine around eating and drinking is also important. Sleep and appetite are connected, and you can regulate your body clock by eating regular meals. Staying hydrated through the day can also help you feel more awake, and improve your wellbeing.

Your nightly routine is still very important though. In the hour or so before bed, try to do things that relax your mind and help you wind down, like reading, watching relaxing TV or having a hot bath. Get your mind and body ready for sleep, and make a habit out of it.

Good habits are the key to healthy sleep: train your body to sleep and wake like clockwork.

Good sleep hygiene is all about routine. A regular rhythm to when you sleep and wake, and consistency in the times you eat, exercise and get natural light, can help synchronise your urge to sleep and your urge to wake, so you feel sleepy at bedtime, and more alert in the day.

FIVE TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Routine

Sleep and wake at the same times each day, and build good habits around sleeping and waking

Calm

Deal with stress and worry and look after your emotional mind so it doesn't keep you up at night.

Warmth

Make sure you're warm enough, and try warm baths to relax your body and unwind your mind.

Quiet

Unexpected noises will wake you up and disturb your sleep, so aim for silence or familiar sounds

Don't panic!

If you can't sleep, don't just lie there; get up and do something relaxing, then try again later.

HOW TO WAKE UP



WAKING UP NATURALLY

With a good sleep routine, your mind will keep track of time and wake you up at the right time naturally, leaving you feeling more awake.

Wake up at an unnatural time, though, and you may miss crucial parts of your sleep cycle. Early risers miss REM sleep, whilst night owls miss restorative NREM sleep.

Some of us naturally wake up earlier in the morning, others later in the day. Your chronotype is genetic and can't be altered, so try to listen to your mind and sleep at times that suit your pace.

"The number of people who can survive on **five hours of sleep or less** without impairment, rounded to a whole number, is zero."

Dr Thomas Roth



WAKING UP ARTIFICIALLY?

Caffeine doesn't actually make you more awake. It blocks out adenosine and makes you feel like you don't need sleep - until it wears off and you realise that you do.

Sleeping pills put you out but can also disrupt sleep cycles, so you may sleep longer, but you might not sleep as well.

There is no substitute (we know of) for a good night's sleep. Don't rely on artificial tools. They can fool you into thinking you slept better than you did. And remember, one sign of sleep deprivation is not realising you're tired!

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