



FACT SHEET 7

Having a good night's sleep is important for maintaining good health. The body needs the opportunity to recharge from the day's activities. Experiencing difficulty sleeping, however, is a common problem. Lack of sleep can lead to:

- Irritability
- Lack of energy
- Poor concentration.

Good quality sleep isn't necessarily a long sleep – it's having what doctors call 'deep sleep' and 'dream sleep'. Most 'deep sleep' occurs during the first five hours after falling asleep. Even if you sleep for only four or five hours, you can still get about the same amount of 'deep sleep' as someone who sleeps for eight to ten hours.

Illness or pain can disrupt sleep. Depression, particularly, can lead to:

- Difficulty in getting to sleep
- Poor quality sleep
- Less sleep
- Frequently waking during the night
- Waking very early in the morning and being unable to get back to sleep.

Poor quality 'deep sleep' can lead to:

- Tiredness during the day
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Aches and pains in the muscles and bones
- An immune system that doesn't work well, leading to more frequent illness
- Longer periods of depression.

Our ability to get good quality sleep can be disrupted by physical illness, infections, pain during the night and psychological stress.

Depression disrupts your sleep patterns and as you recover, your sleep will improve. It is also helpful to work towards restoring a regular sleep pattern as this will help you make a full recovery.

THE SLEEP-WAKE CYCLE AND YOU

Think back over the last two weeks. Have you:

- Felt tired all the time?
- Spent more time in bed than usual?
- Had poor quality or fewer hours of sleep?
- Napped during the day?
- Cut down on physical activities?

If you've answered YES to one or more of these questions, the information that follows can help you get the sleep you need.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR SLEEP

There are a number of things you can do to improve your sleep.

When you wake up in the morning

- Get out of bed as soon as you wake. Don't go back to sleep or try to make up for 'lost sleep'.
- Try to get up at about the same time each morning, perhaps around 7am to 7.30am.
- Go outside into the fresh air.
- Do some physical activity, for example, go for a walk.

During the day

- Do not nap. If you nap, you'll be less tired when you go to bed and you'll probably take longer to fall asleep.
- If you're worrying about things during the night, set aside some time for problem-solving during the day. Identify problems that are causing you stress and solve them using Structured Problem-Solving (SPS) – see *beyondblue* Fact sheet 10: Changing your thinking.
- Keep a sleep-wake diary.
- Review your sleep-wake progress with your doctor at each visit.
- During the day, try to be physically active.
- Avoid drinking caffeine after 4pm and try not to drink more than two cups of caffeine-type drinks each day eg. coffee, strong tea, cola or energy drinks.

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Before going to bed

- Avoid going to bed too early. It isn't the right time for 'deep sleep'.
- Go to bed at around 10pm to 10:30pm.
- Avoid using alcohol to help you sleep. As the alcohol is broken down in your body, it causes you to sleep less deeply and to wake more frequently.
- Don't smoke within an hour or two of going to bed. Smoking stimulates your nervous system.
- Don't go to bed hungry or with a full bladder.
- Regular exercise can improve your sleep, but avoid vigorous exercise late in the evening.
- Allow yourself time to wind down before going to bed. If you are working or studying, stop at least 30 minutes before bedtime and do something relaxing.
- Use your bed only for sleep and sex so that you learn to associate your bed with sleep.
- Avoid taking sleeping pills. If you do need to take sleeping pills, try not to take them for longer than a week because they can be addictive.

While you sleep

- Try to make your bedroom quiet, dim and cool.
- Avoid too many blankets and electric blankets. If you're too hot, you won't go into 'deep sleep'.

OVERCOMING LONG-TERM SLEEPING PROBLEMS

For some people, sleeping problems may last for weeks, months or even years. Not surprisingly this may lead to anxiety about getting to sleep, which in turn makes the problem even worse. It can be helpful to take specific steps to break the cycle of feeling anxious and restless in bed. Below are some steps to follow when you can't get to sleep.

1. Get up if you can't sleep after trying for 15 to 20 minutes. Staying in bed when you're feeling restless and anxious is unlikely to result in sleep.
2. Do something quiet and distracting, for example play cards, read, knit or enjoy a warm bath. If your mind is very active or you can't stop worrying, it may be helpful to concentrate on something else, such as doing a crossword or watching television. By distracting yourself from your worries, you may find it easier to wind down and become sleepy.
3. Go back to bed when you feel more relaxed and sleepy.
4. If you're still awake after a further 15 to 20 minutes, get out of bed again. Repeat this process until you fall asleep shortly after returning to bed.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn about other coping strategies for depression and anxiety

beyondblue Fact sheet 8: Keeping active

beyondblue Fact sheet 9: Reducing alcohol and other drugs

Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety

beyondblue Fact sheet 10: Changing your thinking

beyondblue Fact sheet 11: Antidepressant medication

beyondblue Fact sheet 14: What other treatments are available for depression and anxiety?