# Sleep

## + YOUNG PEOPLE

Having enough quality sleep is vital to your emotional and physical wellbeing. We sleep so we can be active, focused and feel good during the day.

Not being able to get to sleep can be really distressing. If you haven't been able to rest properly, your body and mind can start doing strange things. Poor sleep can be a vicious cycle – not enough sleep may cause the brain to become more active and an over-stimulated brain is less able to fall asleep.

## Sleep and mental health

While sleep is essential for everyone, sleep problems can occur if you or someone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties. Some symptoms and treatments of mental ill-health can affect your sleep in a number of ways.

Everyone is different, and our need for sleep changes over time. What's important is finding a balance that allows you to get the sleep you need as well as achieve your goals and have fun during the day. Having a regular sleeping routine has massive benefits to your physical and emotional health.

## Sleep – what's normal?
### The sleep of 15–25-year-olds

Sleep is really important. As you enter your mid teenage years, natural hormone changes shift your body clock. Your body clock regulates many of your body's patterns, including when you sleep and when you wake up. The shift alters this and causes changes to your sleep patterns.

It's normal to want to go to bed later than you used to, but because of all the changes happening in your body, you actually need more sleep at this time. Sleep research suggests that young people need between 9 and 10 hours of sleep every night. Yet most young people only get about 7 or 8 hours, with the average being around 8 hours of sleep a night.

Making sure you get enough sleep can be tricky. Finding the right balance of sleep is important because it helps you be alert and energetic during the day, and to feel good about yourself.

Not sleeping well can cause you more stress or moodiness. It can tip your balance and make you feel worse about yourself and others. If you're having trouble sleeping, this can have a dramatic effect on your life, such as:

- drowsiness, falling asleep during the day
- not being able to focus, short attention, trouble concentrating or staying mentally alert
- feeling irritable or angry, anxious and stressed, or depressed or down
- memory impairment, poor decision-making, risk-taking behaviour
- lack of enthusiasm, not going to school, TAFE or uni
- reduced physical performance, slower physical reflexes, clumsiness
- reduced academic or sporting performance.

## What helps and what doesn't?

You have more control over your quality of sleep than you may think. Below is a list of tips a lot of people find helpful in getting good sleep. Some may not work for everyone, but you can give them a go to figure out which ones work best for you.

- Stick to a routine of waking at the same time every day, and going to bed at the same time each night.
- Cut back, or stop, using alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine before bed, as they can make it harder to get to sleep, or cause your sleep to be disrupted.
- Try to reduce your TV or computer time in the evenings – artificial light can trick your body into staying awake.
- Try not to nap during the day, as this'll make it harder to sleep in the evening.
- Exercise, but do it at least three hours before bed. Exercising outdoors first thing in the morning can be useful because it helps reset your body clock.
- Do relaxing activities in order to wind down, like reading or listening to music softly. A warm bath or shower can also help to make you feel sleepy.
- Learn relaxation and meditation techniques to help you switch your mind off in the evenings.
- Create a sleep space that works for you – quiet, dark, uncluttered.

### Don't stress if you find yourself waking up in the night

It's actually pretty normal, and worrying about getting back to sleep will probably keep you up longer. Try to relax and wait for the next wave of sleepiness to arrive, and if you find yourself staring at the clock, try turning the clock face away from you.

### Sleeping in

Long sleep-ins can cause poor sleep. Getting up at a similar time every day can help avoid this, and will make it easier to fall asleep at the right time in the evening.

# Coping with stress

If you're constantly rushed and overwhelmed, you're likely to feel tired and drained of energy. Allow yourself some unfocused time each day to refresh. Let your mind wander, daydream or simply watch the clouds go by for a while. It is okay to add 'do nothing' to your to-do list!

Learning to relax is an important life skill and can help to improve your sleep. It may sound simple, but learning to breathe in a calm and controlled way is an easy relaxation strategy that you can use before you go to bed, or if you wake up in the night and find it hard to fall back to sleep.

## Breathing relaxation technique

- While sitting or lying down, make yourself as comfortable as possible.
- Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Repeat this once.
- Close your eyes. Focus your mind on breathing.
- Breathe easily and gently with no effort.
- Breathe in steadily over three seconds.
- As you breathe out steadily over three seconds, say to yourself 'relax' while letting all your muscles go loose and floppy.
- Keep repeating this in a six second cycle (three seconds in and three seconds out) over and over until you find yourself feeling calm and relaxed.