



SLEEP

How much sleep do you need?

At 10 years:	9.75 hours
At 12 years:	9.25 hours
At 14 years:	9 hours
16 years plus:	7-9 hours

Melatonin

When it is dark, your eyes send a message to the hypothalamus in your brain that it is time to feel tired.

Your brain in turn signals to your body to release melatonin which helps you feel tired, get off to sleep and stay asleep.

Drinking caffeine will block the melatonin receptors but does not block production hence the slump you might feel once your coffee has worn off.

Circadian rhythm

A roughly 24 hour internal clock runs in the background of your brain all the time and prompts you to cycle between sleepiness and alertness at regular intervals. Most people's lowest energy level is between 2am and 4am and around 1-3pm.

Each individual has a slightly different rhythm with people broadly falling into 3 categories:

- "Night owls" are happy to stay up late but struggle first thing in the morning,
- "Larks" are great first thing in the morning and are ready for bed early
- The least common category is those who have energy at either time.

Outside factors e.g. how light it is, how active you are and what you eat or drink can impact on your circadian rhythm.

Effects of not enough sleep

Not having enough sleep affects your heart and brain, can cause weight gain and increase the risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke. It can mean you are at higher risk of developing dementia, aging more rapidly and being less creative. You may find regulating your emotions and problem solving is more difficult.

Not having enough sleep can compromise your immune system, meaning that you will be more at risk of infections and will have a harder time recovering when you are ill.

Memories are moved from short term to long term memory while sleeping, so if you want to do well in an exam, a proper night's sleep is more important than the extra revision you could do in that time after 10pm. Put simply if you haven't slept, you won't remember it.



One research paper shows a reduction in recall even 3 days after a bad night's sleep compared to those who had slept well. So, doing an "all-nighter" before an exam is probably the worst thing you could possibly do. Less revision and a good night's sleep will mean you will at least remember the bit of revision you did do.

Things to avoid

- Sugary food and drink
- Strenuous exercise less than 2 hours before bed
- Not doing any exercise during the day
- Not getting any natural light on your skin
- Using screens especially those that emit blue light
- Exciting computer games/rough and tumbling that leave you "buzzing or agitated"
- Scary films or books
- Naps during the day
- Being too hot or too cold
- Discussions, social media or phone calls that are likely to get you thinking too much
- Going to bed hungry or too full
- Coffee, red bull, monster drinks or anything with caffeine



Things to do

- Have a bath
- Have a warm milky drink
- Read
- Listen to calm music
- Meditation/mindfulness (good apps are insight timer or smiling mind)
- Inverted yoga poses e.g. lying with your legs against the wall
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day
- Make sure your bed smells nice and is comfortable
- Change into comfortable bed wear (which is different from your day clothes)
- Use a comforter or weighted bed cover if that helps you feel safe
- Have a small glass of water by the bed
- Keep your room as dark as you feel comfortable with. If you feel afraid of the dark have a low level night light on



Keep your room, and if possible the whole house, quiet during night hours



Sleep Protocol: Getting to Sleep & Getting Back to Sleep

Develop good habits that prepare you for sleep

- Set a regular schedule to go to bed and get up.
- Develop regular rituals to move yourself toward sleep: no big meals or caffeine in the hours before sleep time; exercise during the day but no exercise in the hours before sleep time
- Make bed as comfortable, calming and safe as possible.

Get to sleep (get back to sleep)

- As soon as you notice you are awake, try to get back to sleep immediately. This is not a time to ponder, plan, ruminate or rehearse.
- Stay physically drowsy. Do not turn on the light. Use relaxation techniques.
- If you are making no progress toward getting to sleep after about 10 or 15 minutes, slowly and calmly get out of bed. Do not switch on the light or do anything active. Merely stand still, relaxing in the dark, with your mind as still as possible. Do not fight feelings of heaviness and drowsiness. Soon you will probably feel tired and will want to lie down.

Control intrusive thoughts

- Often what gets in the way of sleep are intrusive thoughts - worrying, planning, anticipating, or rehearsing. It is important to commit yourself to letting go all such thoughts.
- Set aside a quiet time just before bed, outside your bedroom, to do your worrying, planning, etc. Jot down any notes on thoughts or ideas you want to follow-up on. Merely jot something down and put the idea aside.
- Block intrusive thoughts while you are in bed by doing the following: immediately start saying the word "the" over and over, under your breath, with only the slightest movement of your tongue each time you say the word "the". Repeat "the" at a comfortable rate, 2 or 3 times per second. If you also have intrusive images, try moving your eyes as if you were following an irregular circle. Keep your eyes closed, and follow the circle in a slow and lazy way.