

## HOW TO SLEEP AS SOUNDLY AS POSSIBLE

Getting a good night's sleep is one of the most precious daily gifts you can give yourself. According to the Sleep Council ([www.sleepcouncil.com](http://www.sleepcouncil.com)), as many as 1 in 5 of us suffers from poor sleep.

How much should you sleep? It is difficult to generalise. 7 or 8 hours per night is often seen as about the right level for most. Listen to your body and make sure you wake up feeling refreshed. If you feel drowsy during the day then you should obviously be looking to sleep longer. The benefits of proper sleep are immense and include:

- **Brainpower.** Some controlled studies have shown that alertness, memory and concentration all improve significantly as a result of consistent sleep habits.
- **Overall health.** Our bodies' remarkable automatic healing functions operate while we sleep and as our muscles relax. Long-term studies (University of Warwick) suggest that sleeping five hours or less increases the risk of various health issues by as much as 50%.
- **Energy.** Good sleep provides us with an extra edge and helps us to fulfil our goals.
- **Stress management.** Insufficient sleep means we do our jobs less well and feel less positive about our work, in turn creating more pressure and making it harder to sleep.

Here are some ideas to help improve both the quality and amount of sleep which you experience:

- **Prepare well for sleep.** Evening rituals really help as well as certain hot drinks. Avoid heavy meals just before bed. Chill out e.g. a bath. Sleep at regular times if possible.
- **Create a sleep-inducing environment** e.g. by use of lighting or control of noise levels. Take work materials or distractions out of the bedroom and turn it into a "sanctuary".
- **Write down your worries and actions to address them.** You can waste hours in bed running problems through your head. Instead, get up for 5 minutes and write them down.
- **Be casual and relaxed about sleep.** Be relaxed if sleep is hard to come by. Breathe slowly and deeply or do something else for a while.
- **See a doctor if you have chronic insomnia.** Do not trivialise this issue as it can have serious consequences for your overall health.
- **Buy the best bed/mattress possible.** It is one of the best investments in your wellbeing.
- **Regular exercise aids sleep.** Even an evening walk helps you relax to be ready for bed.

Finally, you might benefit from acquiring the siesta habit. Research from NASA and others shows that even a 15-minute nap has broad-ranging benefits in terms of alertness, concentration, memory and creativity. These benefits can also improve productivity at work. More and more companies are recognising this and providing facilities for employees to take naps. A large study in Greece (Athens Medical School) also found that naps are good for the heart. However, remember that power naps complement and do not substitute for a good night's sleep.

**Disclaimer.** This article is for general information only. We cannot be held responsible for any actions you might take as a result of it. Please seek medical advice before making any significant change to your habits or lifestyle.