WELLSPRING
The Sleep Issue

Tim Ferriss
Best selling author

CLIMBING OFF THE FERRISS WHEEL
THE ‘HUMAN GUINEA PIG’ DEFEATS HIS SLEEP PROBLEMS

THE MECHANICS OF SLEEP  ◗ SCRIMPING ON SLEEP: A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE
EXPERTS DEFINE THE PERFECT SLUMBER  ◗ TURNING SLEEP DISORDERS AROUND

$3.90 OR FREE FOR ALUMNI
Is there a more intriguing component of our health and wellness than sleep? It is something we spend close to a third of our lives doing and literally can’t live without, yet it is a challenging state to measure and analyse given it is essentially an internal process.

What we do know is sleep acts as food for the brain, allowing our body to perform the vital work of regeneration. The consequences to our health can be all-consuming, with sleep deficiency impacting alertness, cognition, productivity, safety and mood. This in turn can damage our physical and mental health, and at its worst lead to premature death.

Chronic sleep disorders and lifestyle-related sleep problems are widespread in Australia today and are a common issue treated by natural health practitioners as a complement to conventional practices. It is a concern that despite the serious health implications, many Australians continue to de-prioritise sleep over other activities seen to provide a greater ‘conscious reward’. You can read more about this trend in our interview with Founding Director of the Sleep Health Foundation Dorothy Bruck (page 9).

In our dissection of all things sleep-related, we came across many uplifting stories of people taking on their sleep issues and making vast improvements to their quality of life. This includes bestselling author Tim Ferriss who shared the techniques which worked best for him in treating his self-described ‘horrible’ onset insomnia in his book *The 4-Hour Body*.

On these pages you’ll also find analysis on particular sleep issues affecting children, the key lifestyle issues robbing us of valuable shut-eye and tips from the world’s leading health and wellness experts about tweaks which can help us get closer to the perfect slumber.

It is my hope this issue moves you to prioritise sleep highly and to view it as one of the greatest forms of self-care, and to act on any sleep issues you or your loved ones experience as quickly as possible.

David Hoey
Editor

*twitter.com/davidohoey*
Sleep disorders are thought to cost Australia $5.1 billion each year in healthcare, productivity and associated costs (The Medical Journal of Australia).

It is estimated 40 per cent of people sleep less than the recommended seven to nine hours a night.

Poor quality sleep or sleep deprivation has been associated with obesity, diabetes, weakened immune systems and some cancers.

The cost to the community of drowsy driving road accidents is around $2 billion a year, with half the drowsy driving accidents in Australia involving people 25 years or younger (Sleep Health Foundation).

1.5 million Australians (8.9 per cent of the population) have a sleep disorder, mainly consisting of obstructive sleep apnoea, insomnia or restless leg syndrome (Sleep Health Foundation, 2010).

Australians spent $81.5 million in 2010 on medical devices relating to sleep disorders, mainly CPAP devices (Deloitte Economics).

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**SNAPSHOT**

**Nigh’ Nigh’ Sleepy Head**

This toolkit for parents comes with a lullaby which talks about sleep to help little ones transition from wakefulness to a deep sleep. It also comes with a little “ted” dressed in his pyjamas to help establish a bedtime routine.

nighnigh.com.au

**Sleep Cycle Alarm Clock**

This extremely popular app helps track your sleep patterns and wakes you during your lightest sleep phase during a predefined 30 minute window to help you feel naturally rested without an alarm clock.

sleepcycle.com

**Wellspring loves**

Wake is a modern sleep device seeking funding on Kickstarter which simulates a sunrise for the user to wake them up without disturbing their sleeping partner. Instead of using normal speakers that wake up everyone, the device lives on your bedroom wall and uses beams of light and sound sent to your exact location. Sign us up!

luceralabs.com
Author, pioneer of ‘lifestyle design’ and self-proclaimed ‘human guinea pig’ Tim Ferriss has written three best-selling books, advises innovative brands like Uber and Spotify, connects with millions of readers each month through his blog, and speaks five languages fluently. Mastering the art of enjoying a good night’s sleep however proved more elusive...
1. Consume 150 to 250 calories of low-glycemic index foods in small quantities before bed

Morning fatigue and headaches aren’t just from poor sleep. Low blood sugar following overnight fasting is often a contributing factor. Just prior to bed have a small snack such as a few sticks of celery with almond butter or a mandarin and 5–8 small almonds. Make a pre-bed snack part of your nutritional program.

1–2 tablespoons of flaxseed oil (120-240 calories) can be used in combination with the above to further increase cell repair during sleep and thus decrease fatigue.

2. Eating your meals at set times can be as important as sleeping on a schedule

Eating meals at set times helps regulate melatonin, ghrelin, leptin and other hormones that affect sleep cycles.

3. Have a large fat and protein-dominant meal within three hours of sleep

Meals of at least 800mg cholesterol and 40 grams of protein produced dramatically faster time-to-sleep scores than meals of lower volume or lower protein or fat.

4. 19°C to 21°C temperature

I found using a single bed sheet in a room which was 19°C to 21°C produced the fastest time to sleep. Warmer temperatures never worked, but as low as 18°C would work well if I wore socks to keep my feet warm. Ideal temperature is highly individualised and a narrow range, so experiment with precise controls.

5. Turn off preoccupation with afternoon closure

Determine and set a top priorities to-do list that afternoon for the following day to avoid late night planning. Do not read non-fiction prior to bed, which encourages projection into the future and planning. Read fiction that engages the imagination and demands present-state attention.

6. Philips goLITE

I bought this travel-sized blue-light emitter for a friend who already had the same device, so I began to use it as a replacement for coffee first thing in the morning. I set it to the side of my laptop, pointing it at me at a 15-degree angle for 15 minutes. That evening, my time to sleep was less than 10 minutes for the first time in a week. I was able to replicate this effect 4 times out of 5.

7. Half military crawl position

This was a result of polling more than 70,000 Twitter followers for successful treatments for onset insomnia. Lie on your chest with your head on a pillow and facing to the right. Both arms should be straight by your sides, palms up. Now bring your right arm up until the top of your right hand is under your pillow and under your head. Next bring your right knee out to that side until it is bent and approximately 90 degrees. This is a last-ditch resort that works for one simple reason: you can’t move. Less fidgeting results in faster sleep.

Adapted from The 4-Hour Body: An Uncommon Guide to Rapid Fat-Loss, Incredible Sex, and Becoming Superhuman Copyright © 2010 by Tim Ferriss. Published by Crown Archetype, a division of Random House, Inc.

About Tim Ferriss

Tim Ferriss is an author, entrepreneur, angel investor and public speaker. He has been listed as one of Fast Company’s ‘Most Innovative Business People’ and has written the bestselling books The 4-Hour Workweek, The 4-Hour Body and The 4-Hour Chef. He has also recently released a new TV show called “The Tim Ferriss Experiment” and has a popular podcast called “The Tim Ferriss Show.”

timothyferriss.com
Sleeping in a different room to my husband saved my sanity

Jennifer Adams, 49, became so sleep deprived when her partner moved in with her she decided to move into a different room.

“The worst sleep deprivation I ever experienced was when my husband Fraser first moved in with me. His snoring due to sleep apnoea was so bad we lasted only one week in the same bed, and it was incredible how much the lack of sleep affected us physically, mentally and emotionally in such a short space of time. I quickly realised as much as we loved each other, we just couldn’t share a bed.

The best way I can describe the way I felt during that period was ‘fuzzy headed’. I’m very much an ‘eight hours a night’ girl and so seven days of broken sleep really took its toll. I couldn’t concentrate, was short tempered and felt I was really under performing at work.

Moving into a separate bedroom was actually quite a tough decision that really challenged us initially as a new couple. I didn’t know anyone else who slept separately from their partner and thought it might be the beginning of the end. We both felt a real sense of failure. Yet everything else in the relationship was so ‘right’ we pushed through those feelings and over time came up with new ways to keep those feelings of intimacy alive between us.

We’ve now been very happily sleeping in our own bedrooms for nine years and both enjoy having our own space and sleeping well. We no longer feel resentful towards each other due to sleep deprivation. It’s just become part of who we are as a couple.

I’ve since learnt around 25 per cent of couples actually sleep separately, yet you don’t hear about it much. It is one of the greatest bedroom taboos, and it always surprises me how many people (predominantly women) forgo enough sleep by sleeping in the same room as a disruptive partner in fear of being judged.

So many people hide their decision like it is a dirty secret, and with popular culture showing happy couples constantly in bed together, it is no wonder people are afraid to prioritise sleep over the image of domestic bliss.

This led me on a crusade to show people that deciding to sleep separately from your partner doesn’t have the mean the relationship is doomed. After speaking to as many people in my situation as I could I decided to write my book Sleeping Apart Not Falling Apart as a way of removing the stigma.

My book delves into research on the social practice of sleeping and discusses how couples who have trouble sleeping together can get a good night’s sleep without sacrificing any aspect of their relationship.

To this day people we don’t know tend to look at us curiously when I tell them about our sleeping arrangements. I can’t tell you how many people have whispered to me out of the earshot of their partner how much they would like to do the same!

There’s a long way to go to shift public perception, but I’m enjoying getting the conversation started.”
My CPAP machine helped me rebuild my life

Stacey Copas, 36, was diagnosed with sleep apnoea after experiencing sleep issues which permeated every aspect of her life. Today she sleeps soundly with the help of her CPAP machine.

“I remember sleep becoming an issue for me when I was in my late teens. I used to have to stop on the short drive to work to snap myself out of the ‘head fog’ I was experiencing. I felt dizzy constantly and ended up not being able to work for 18 months. During that period I found myself eating lots of lollies and chocolate to give myself little energy boosts. I saw specialist after specialist trying to get some help… no one had any answers. It was a frustrating and isolating period of my life.

For a long time I didn’t think it was sleep which could be the problem as I felt the same whether I’d had three hours or 10 hours sleep. I just knew something was wrong so I get pushing ahead to find the answers. Eventually a doctor asked if I snored, which I did. I then saw a sleep specialist and was booked in for a sleep study, where you stay in hospital overnight for a series of tests to measure how well you sleep and how your body responds to sleep problems.

The results were conclusive and showed I had obstructive sleep apnoea, a disorder where a person’s breathing is interrupted during sleep which can stop the brain and the rest of the body getting enough oxygen.

The study also showed I responded very well to sleeping with a CPAP machine, which increases air pressure in your throat so your airway doesn’t collapse when you breathe in. I’ve been using a CPAP machine every night ever since and it has improved every aspect of my life.

Straight away I started to fall asleep more quickly and I felt so different in the morning. I was full of energy and my head felt clear. Over the past ten years the machines have become smaller, lighter and quieter which makes travel and sharing a bed much more comfortable.

Mindfulness meditation helped me tap into a new sense of calm

Marcus Mitford, 36, has Sleep Onset Disorder and discovered mindfulness meditation was the one technique which complemented his other treatments and practices to offer true peace of mind.

“I’ve had sleep problems as far back as I can remember. When I was four I would stay up all night staring at shadows cast from outside the windows. Fast forward to boarding school, where the other guys in my dorm came to know at any time of the night they could reliably call my name and I’d answer. When I started work in the corporate world it all came to a head due to the sudden inflexibility to manage the way I did before having a more rigid schedule. It got so bad I developed a way of hiding in the toilet cubicle that allowed me to doze during the day. I remember having to excuse myself from major meetings because the room was spinning and I thought I might faint.

I started experiencing nose bleeds, blurred vision and nausea. I constantly felt on the verge of blacking out and started to feel disassociated from my environment. It was a full blown physical shut down. It felt like every night I was getting further off track, like I’d literally forgotten the knack of how to sleep.

I used to listen to loud and abrasive music in the mornings to help me ‘wake up’, take cold showers in the change rooms and found the best places to eat where I could relax my limbs and rest my eyes in secret.

I was eventually diagnosed with Sleep Onset Disorder. This basically means my circadian rhythm is longer than usual which makes it hard for me to fall asleep by a conventional bedtime and to wake up at an appropriate time.

I’ve tried every treatment and lifestyle change under the sun and have found a combination of therapies worked well to stop the downward spiral I was heading towards. I’m a long time patient of the Epworth Sleep Centre, and the team there helped normalise the issue and explain the science behind it.

I found researching sleep hygiene incredibly helpful. I never use an iPhone or laptop from 1.5 hours before bed. I’ve also found a dose of sunlight in the morning important, and a hot shower an hour and a half before bed allows enough time for your body temperature to spike and fall, with the drop acting as a natural sleep cue.

I recently did a ten week mindfulness meditation course with the Melbourne Sleep Disorders Centre which has brought me a great deal of relief by dialling down the severity of my insomnia by a few notches.

I don’t believe a serious sleep issue can be resolved in a single easy hit. It may require some patience as you take incremental steps to gradually make your way back to a good night’s sleep. Once you accept this, you relieve some of the pressure and it will come more easily.

Don’t fall for the trap of quick fixes. A sleeping pill may offer you a reasonable night’s sleep in the short term, but there are often side effects and the effectiveness will eventually diminish.

I was able to return to work, pick my social life back up and was soon fitting more into my days than most people fit into a week! I’ve taken up competitive athletics and travel around Australia as a keynote speaker talking about resilience.

If you are having sleep issues that can’t be explained, ask your GP to refer you to a sleep specialist. It is worth considering having a sleep study – it is not invasive and there are no drugs involved so you have nothing to lose.

staceycopas.com

My life today is very different. I can function normally over an extended period of time, where previously the anxiety I felt about an upcoming meeting or project deadline would cause a week of teetering between exhaustion and anxiety.

I look at my insomnia as a relationship. I’ve learnt that even though sleep can be illusive, confusing and mysterious at times, if you treat the condition with some TLC you can sleep peacefully together in the same bed.”

epworthsleepcentre.com.au
msdc.com.au
oursleepdrive.net
Take sleeping matters into your own hands

90 per cent of Australians will suffer from a sleep disorder during their lifetime which can have far-reaching implications so it is important to act quickly when problems arise¹, writes Dr Jo Abbott.

Getting a good night’s sleep gives us a chance to rest and face the next day with renewed energy. While we all know it’s a good thing, sleep is one of those things where the harder we try the harder it can seem to be. Having difficulties sleeping can be incredibly frustrating and draining. Not only do we not feel refreshed but we may be distressed about our sleeping difficulties and the challenges that lay ahead the next day.

For temporary sleeping difficulties there are a number of things you can try yourself. For example, you might stop drinking coffee in the evening, allow yourself some time to unwind in the evening before going to bed and go to bed and get up at similar times each day. In some cases sleep medications may be prescribed for short-term use.

For long-term sleeping difficulties it is often best to get specialised help. Through a tailored treatment you may be assisted to make changes to your sleeping habits so your body can be retrained to feel sleepy when you want to be sleeping. Often people feel they have already tried lots of things to improve their sleep, but a health professional can help them regularly use a number of sleep-improving strategies together rather than trying things in isolation for short time periods.

Often this is done through Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, which teaches you how to change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that contribute to and maintain sleeping difficulties. It helps you make your bedroom a place of restful sleep rather than lying awake, tossing and turning.

Here are my tips for coping with temporary sleeping difficulties.

Keep regular bedtime hours

Your body has an internal body clock that controls when you feel sleepy and alert. This clock needs to get into a rhythm so you feel sleepy and awake at regular times. Going to bed and getting up at similar times helps get your body clock in sync like this.

Keep the bedroom for sleep and sex only

Minimising the non-sleep activities you do in the bedroom will help you view the bedroom as a place of sleeping. If reading in bed helps you feel sleepy do it for no more than about 20 minutes and stop sooner if you start to feel sleepy. If you find yourself lying in bed awake for more than 20 minutes it is also best to get up and leave the bedroom and do something non-stimulating like light reading until you feel sleepy again. This can be hard to do, especially on cold nights but if you stay in bed and are worrying about not sleeping you’ll start to view the bedroom as a place of lying awake rather than of being asleep.

Learn mindfulness

Mindfulness is about focusing on what we are feeling, thinking or experiencing in the present moment, without judgement. You might focus on your breathing or enjoy the experiences of an activity like walking or listening to music. This focus on present moment helps us learn not to react to thoughts and worries that can interfere with sleep. You can practise mindfulness by listening to a mindfulness meditation audio, taking part in an activity like pilates, yoga, or walking, or by doing daily activities, like eating or washing the dishes, in a mindful way.

About Dr Jo Abbott

Dr Jo Abbott is a Health Psychologist, Research Fellow and the Deputy Director (Acting) of the National eTherapy Centre at Swinburne University of Technology.

Dr Abbott’s main area of expertise is in the development, evaluation and delivery of online health interventions. This has included developing and evaluating an online insomnia treatment.

To register an interest in hearing about future opportunities to participate in research on sleep interventions email to: sleep-e@mentalhealthonline.org.au.

The National Sleep Foundation broke new ground earlier this year when it revised its recommendations for optimal sleep times based on people’s age.

“This is the first time any professional organisation has developed age-specific recommended sleep durations based on a rigorous, systematic review of the world scientific literature relating sleep duration to health, performance and safety,” said Chairman of the board of the National Sleep Foundation Charles A. Cziesler.

The report found children from four months to 17 years of age need more sleep than thought previously. It also emphasised some people might sleep longer or shorter than the recommended times with no adverse effects, but those far outside the normal range may experience serious health problems.

People should also take note on how long it takes for them to fall asleep, according to naturopath Katherine Maslen.

“I’ve always said good sleepers rarely think about their sleep habits. Becoming hyper focused on sleep will just exacerbate the issue. If you are relaxed about your ability to sleep, it is likely you won’t even realise you’ve woken.”

Who is most at risk?

Shift workers and new mothers are particularly vulnerable to having their sleep/wake cycles disturbed resulting in sleep problems, according to Postdoctoral Research Fellow from Washington State University Gemma Peach.

“Our circadian rhythm is disrupted when we are required to be awake at a time when our body knows it should be sleeping. This not only results in sleep loss, it has also been shown to lead to an increased risk of developing cardiovascular problems, cancers and anxiety and depression,” Gemma said.

There could be long-term impacts of having your circadian rhythms interrupted over a period of time.

“Many shift workers continue to experience poor sleep even in retirement and are more likely to experience poor health than non-shift workers,” she said.

Dorothy Bruck said there were also pockets of people who happened to run on a higher frequency who are more likely to experience sleep difficulties.

“People who are generally hyperaroused tend to experience lighter sleep and can get themselves into quite a damaging cycle by relying on coffee or energy drinks which results in fragmented sleep as the stimulants stay in your system.”

The best way to reset your circadian rhythm if it has been disturbed due to a change to your routine is through lots of exposure to morning light and reducing exposure to the light transmitted by phones, computers, tablets and video games in the evening.

“Exposure to light keeps us aligned to a daytime schedule, and toning this down at night tells the body it is time to shift and prepare for sleep,” Gemma said.

The perfect sleep: does it exist?

Will sleeping for at least eight hours a night and hitting the sack before 11pm ensure you get the perfect night’s sleep? Health experts say it’s not that simple.

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SLEEP TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

Getting enough sleep is vital for a child’s healthy development, yet a staggering 40 per cent of Australian children today experience sleep problems. Wellspring asked Postdoctoral Fellow, Paediatric Sleep from The Ritchie Centre, MIMR-PHI and Monash University Dr Sarah Biggs why our kids aren’t getting enough sleep.

When you compare the number of children experiencing sleep difficulties with other common ailments, the prevalence of this issue is deeply concerning.

Four out of every 10 children experience some type of sleep problem. These can range from the more benign sleep disturbances like sleep walking to quite serious sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnoea, which is a problem for almost 1 million Australian children.

Behavioural sleep problems in children are also common. Many parents struggle with getting their child to go to bed and stay in bed. These behavioural sleep problems can occur any time during childhood but are most frequent during times of transition, such as moving to another room or bed, starting school or changing schools.

One of the biggest factors contributing to sleep difficulties in children is a lack of routine.

My research has shown having a regular routine is more important for children than getting the recommended amount of sleep. I found children aged from five to 10 years who varied their bedtimes by more than one hour over the week (including weekends) were four times more likely to display the same difference in bedtime across the week were six times more likely to display the same challenging behaviours.

The way we talk about ‘recommended sleep times’ has changed.

New recommendations for optimal sleep times have been published just this year. For the first time it has been recognised every person needs a different amount of sleep, including children. There is no magic number. It is all about how the child is performing during the day. If they are not over active, moody, falling asleep at the wrong time or places and can concentrate, they are likely getting enough sleep.

Teenagers experience unique sleep issues due to pubertal changes to their biological clocks which result in a phenomenon called ‘social jetlag’.

Social jetlag describes a misalignment between the clock time and the body clock similar to normal jetlag but the sufferer hasn’t travelled anywhere. The need for sleep is a biological process and is regulated by the circadian rhythm which stems from the brain. It is the body’s internal clock which regulates sleep and waking by producing hormones, such as melatonin, at particular points during the day based on the cycle of light and dark to trigger feelings of alertness or tiredness.

During puberty, the release of melatonin occurs an hour or two later than usual, which means teenagers don’t get sleepy until 11pm or midnight. Then of course, they need to get up early to go to school which results in them often being sleep deprived. Add electronics and social media and you can end up with the perfect storm. The consequences of social jetlag can include excessive sleepiness, moodiness, lack of coordination, headaches and nausea.

Interestingly, few parents seek help when there are problems.

A study showed, of the parents who identified their child as having a clinical sleep issue, less than 15 per cent consulted their doctor about it. On the flip side, doctors also don’t often ask about sleep during consultations. This is something that organisations like the Australasian Sleep Association and Sleep Health Foundation are trying to change through education and increased awareness. Often it will only take a few helpful hints or treatment strategies to see things turn for the better.

The best things parents can do for children experiencing sleep difficulties is to teach them to make sleep a priority.

A great place for parents to start is to teach their children sleep is a time when they grow, form memories and when the body and mind recovers to help them get the most out of playing and learning the next day. Ensure children have a regular bedtime and consistent bedtime routine. Keep the lights low in the bedroom and remove all electronic devices, including televisions, and don’t give children any caffeinated beverages in the three hours before bed. If sleep issues persist the best thing to do is see a medical professional.

About Sarah

Sarah completed her undergraduate psychology degree at University of South Australia in 2005 and commenced a PhD in paediatric sleep at University of Adelaide.

Since undertaking her position at Monash University, Sarah has spearheaded the group’s research examining the cognitive and behavioural implications of sleep problems in children. She sits on the Executive Board of the Australasian Sleep Association, is an active member of the Sleep Health Foundation, and is organiser of the World Sleep Day activities across Australia and New Zealand. Sarah has published more than 30 manuscripts in the area of sleep, cognition, learning and behaviour in children and in 2012 was awarded an NHMRC Early Career Training Fellowship.

sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Recommended hours of sleep for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hours of Sleep</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 3 MONTHS</td>
<td>14 – 17 hours but not less than 11 or more than 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 11 MONTHS</td>
<td>12 – 15 hours but not less than 10 or more than 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 – 2 YEARS</td>
<td>11 – 14 hours but not less than 9 or more than 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 5 YEARS</td>
<td>10 – 13 hours but not less than 8 or more than 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 13 YEARS</td>
<td>9 – 11 hours but not less than 7 or more than 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 – 17 YEARS</td>
<td>8 – 10 hours but not less than 7 or more than 11</td>
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Naturopath and author Katherine Maslen said the sleep cycle actually begins hours before bed with your body reducing cortisol, which it uses to keep the body awake and alert, and increasing melatonin before you fall asleep.

Every person cycles between two types of sleep – non-rapid eye movement (NREM) which represents 75 per cent of our sleep time and rapid eye-movement (REM) sleep which makes up the remaining 25 per cent. Most people experience between four and six sleep cycles, with each lasting up to 110 minutes.

Researchers believe the brain rejuvenates and rests during REM sleep, and the body heals, regenerates tissue and builds bone and muscle during NREM sleep.

Non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep

There are three phases experienced during NREM sleep. During the first five to 10 minute phase our eyes are closed and we are easily woken up. We then experience a lighter sleep where our heart rate slows and the temperature of the body drops. The next stage involves a deep sleep which sees our body build bone and muscle, strengthen our immunity and repair and rebuild.

Rapid eye-movement (REM) sleep

REM sleep is well known for the quick eye movements, body twitching and dreams which occur during this stage. It is during this period energy is directed to the brain and body, the brain becomes active, the heart rate quickens, blood pressure rises and the muscles of the body become completely relaxed. It is also during this period that we process all the information we took in the previous day.

Founding Director of the Sleep Health Foundation Professor Dorothy Bruck said despite most people thinking of sleep as a continuous state throughout the night, this was far from the case.

“We recently asked a group of people to draw the shape of sleep, and most drew one straight line which showed us there is a strong misconception where sleep is concerned. It is more like a rollercoaster, with cycles of lighter and deeper sleep,” Dorothy said.

“There were evolutionary benefits to why this occurred as it helped people protect themselves during the night as humans evolved. It is important to remember waking up isn’t dysfunctional at all – the important thing is how quickly you can get back to sleep.”

Sleep facts that blew our socks off

1. Parents of new babies typically miss out on six months worth of sleep in the first two years of their child’s life.
2. The record for the longest period of time without sleep is 11 days.
3. Sea otters hold hands when they sleep so they don’t drift away from each other.
4. Some deaf people make sign language in their sleep.
5. Neuroscientists believe babies don’t dream for the first few years of their life (Children’s Dreaming and the Development of Consciousness, 2002)
**Eat more protein**

Nutritionist Cassandra Law said adding more protein to the diet could play a major role in regulating your sleep and stabilising blood sugar levels.

“Great foods to include in your diet to help with sleep include meat and seafood, tofu, yoghurt, walnuts, flax, chia and pumpkin seeds,” said Cassandra.

High protein foods are ideal snacks before bedtime because they boost satiety and increase your body’s energy expenditure.

📸 instagram.com/green_brick_road_health

**Consider a gratitude journal**

Regularly reflecting on what you have to be grateful for can be a useful tool to minimise stress through conditioning the mind to focus less on the negative. Author of *DeStress to Success* Leo Willcocks suggested a good place to start is by writing down five things you are grateful for every day for 30 days.

“Think about all the components of your life – financial, career, family, education, mental health, physical health, spiritual and social. Look for things you are grateful for in those areas and note the positive flow on effects.”

Leo said it could also be helpful to retrain the mind to be grateful for the challenges we face.

“When we look back at life, it is often through challenging times we grow the most and create the most joy. Why not learn to be grateful for those moments when they arise?”

📸 leowillcocks.com

**Exercise first thing**

Naturopath and author Katherine Maslen said doing star jumps or balancing exercises on rising has been shown to help regulate the sleep/wake cycle by telling the body you are awake. Even 60 seconds of movement has been shown to help.

📸 katherinemaslen.com

**Create the perfect pre-bed ritual**

Carving out time to wind down properly before bed is a non-negotiable part of a healthy sleep routine. It creates a clear association between certain restful activities and falling asleep so that our bodies can get into the right zone to switch off.

Popular ways to relax before bed include dimming the lights, having a warm bath, listening to calming music and even preparing your clothes for the following day.

Nutritionist and *The Happy Cookbook* author Lola Berry lists her ‘before bed’ ritual as one of the most important elements in helping her drift off to the land of nod.

“I like to light a candle in my room and turn on my Himalayan salt lamp. Then I pick a book for a quick read. This sets a relaxing tone before I drift off.”

📸 lolaberry.com

**Find the perfect cuppa**

A cup of herbal tea can be just the thing to send us to the land of nod. Naturopath and lecturer Lidia Bier’s bedtime beverage of choice is chamomile tea with oat milk.

“This combination sounds crazy but it works a charm. Chamomile has long been used to treat insomnia and due to its calming and relaxing properties it is still one of the most popular herbal sleep remedies today,” said Lidia.

“The addition of soothing oat milk seals the deal. A long employed nervous system tonic, oats also contain a decent amount of magnesium which is shown to enhance a restful night’s sleep. The ritual of preparing and slowly sipping this soothing concoction each night is also meditative and restoring.”

📸 instagram.com/squidia.vegan.naturopath
Try ‘Beditation’

Psychologist Angela Bradley has developed a technique to help people switch off and get into the sleep zone by following these simple steps.

1. Lay comfortably in your bed on your back, hands folded on your tummy, jaw loose and eyes gently closed. Put a slight smile on your face and make sure you’re neither too hot nor too cold.
2. Begin belly breathing at a pace that matches your current breathing rate and gradually slow it down to a rhythm that feels peaceful, like a tide. When breathing in, the tummy should be out, when breathing out, the tummy should be flat.
3. Now let your thoughts and self-talk begin to flow in on the inhalation and gently out again on the exhalation. Don’t grab, judge or worry about anything in your head, just let it come in and wash out again with your breath.
4. Revise step one. Slacken your jaw, drop your tongue away from the roof of your mouth and roll your eyeballs slightly up behind your closed eyelids. Relax, flow, think only of the sound of the breathing tide, washing in and out. Keep this going until you drift into restful sleep.

Keep your cool

Chinese medicine practitioners believe people experiencing sleep difficulties are often found to have underlying issues with their body temperature.

Acupuncturist and herbalist Shura Ford from Ford Wellness Group said an elevated body temperature could unsettle the mind and cause restless sleep, dreaming and night sweats.

“A food remedy, acupuncture and herbs are tools we use to cool the body and calm the spirit,” Shura said.

Embrace essential oils

Essential oils are used by many people experiencing sleep issues for their calming properties. They are also thought to stimulate the pineal gland to release more melatonin and balance the nervous system.

Director of Aesthetics Education at the College of Natural Beauty Heddy Macaulay said lavender, roman chamomile and ylang ylang were particularly effective relaxants.

“Adding a few drops to a bath before bed or using the oils in a vaporiser or oil burner are fantastic ways to encourage restful sleep.”

SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS

Sleep is a key component of restoring our physical and mental health, yet it is something so many people struggle to achieve. The Medical Journal of Australia reported up to 35 per cent of Australians experience disrupted sleep, inadequate amounts of sleep, excessive sleepiness and irritability, with half these problems caused by specific sleep disorders and the other half due to poor sleep habits or choices.

Wellspring spoke with leading health and wellness experts to understand how to get that bit closer to the perfect slumber.

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