

# AM I SLEEPING RIGHT?

Sleep is a significant part of our lives; we spend roughly 1/3 of our time on sleep. Sleep is vital, universal and absolutely necessary for almost all living beings. It is estimated that half of the population will experience sleep disorders or problems at some point in their lives. This highlights the importance of a healthy sleep routine as a foundation for mental and physical well-being. This factsheet is designed to inform you about sleep and offer tips to manage sleep difficulties.

## WHY SHOULD WE PAY ATTENTION TO OUR SLEEP?

Sleep has many important functions such as rest and recovery, regulation of physiological processes, learning and memory, emotion regulation, and removing of brain waste. A chronic lack of quality sleep has far-reaching consequences for both body and mind. It not only disrupts daily functioning, but also increases the risk of serious health problems. Sleep problems in daily life can lead to reduced productivity and performance, more mistakes and accidents, and reduced motivation and initiative. Potential long-term consequences of disturbed or poor sleep can include high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, weakened immune system, cognitive impairments such as concentration problems and memory loss, and increased risk of mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety disorders.

So, what makes a good night's sleep and how can we get it?

## WHAT IS GOOD SLEEP?

Good sleep is more than just the number of hours you spend in bed. Both sleep quality and sleep duration play an important role in how rested and functional you feel during the day. Ideal sleep duration varies from person to person, and is influenced by age and genetic factors, among others. Research shows that about 65% of people sleep between 7-8 hours a night. The important thing is not whether you sleep exactly 8 hours, but whether you feel fit and alert during the day. Although sleep duration often gets the most attention, sleep quality is at least as important. In short: good sleep is sleep that restores you sufficiently to function well during the day - not just sleep that lasts long.

## TIPS AND TRICKS FOR BETTER SLEEP

Maintaining good sleep hygiene is essential for achieving restful and restorative sleep. Here are some key practices to consider:

### ✓ Regular Exercise

Engaging in regular physical activity can promote deep sleep and can help reduce tension. Exercise can also help with fatigue. However, avoid intense exercise close to bedtime, as it may make it harder to fall asleep. It is recommended to finish exercising at least a few hours before going to bed.

### ✓ Daylight and Evening Light

Ensure you get enough natural light during the day and reduce light exposure in the evening. This helps regulate your circadian rhythm and the production of the sleep hormone melatonin.

### ✓ **Environment**

Creating a Quiet and restful Environment: Minimize noise in your sleeping area to create a peaceful environment conducive to sleep.

Optimal Room Temperature: The ideal room temperature for a good night's sleep is around 18°C.

### ✓ **Nutrition and substances**

Refrain from consuming fatty foods or large meals before bedtime, as they can be heavy on the stomach and affect sleep quality. Eating earlier in the evening can also aid digestion and prevent sleep disturbances.

Substances such as alcohol, caffeine, smoking, and drugs can reduce the quality of deep sleep. For caffeine in particular, it's best to limit its intake, especially in the afternoon and evening.

### ✓ **Consistent Sleep Schedule**

Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day to regulate your internal clock.

### ✓ **Relaxation Techniques**

Engage in relaxation techniques such as meditation, reading, or progressive muscle relaxation and body scans to unwind before bed. Relax and gradually unwind during the evening +/- 1 to 1.5 hours before going to bed. Distinguish between active and passive relaxation.

### ✓ **Stimulus Control**

Associate your bed with sleep and avoid activities that promote wakefulness. Only go to bed when you are sleepy, and use the bed only for sleep, short periods of relaxation, and sexual activity. If you cannot fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, get out of bed, do a calming activity, and return to bed only when you feel sleepy. The same principle applies if you wake up during the night and have trouble falling back asleep.

## **Conclusion**

With targeted tips and lifestyle adjustments, many sleep problems can be prevented or reduced. But if sleep problems persist or hinder your functioning, it is important to seek professional advice in time from for instance a General Practitioner, Sleep Laboratory, Sleep Psychologist/Somnologist or Psychologist.

## **References**

The information presented is based on course content from the master's education at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.