

## Health problems related to poor sleep

Not getting enough sleep and poor quality sleep can contribute to serious health problems such as:

- > obesity
- > type 2 diabetes
- > cardiovascular disease
- > kidney disease
- > poor mental health.

When we sleep our brains remain active, but many physiological functions are lowered such as body temperature, breathing and heart rate. Our sleep is synchronised to our body clock that controls daily variations (circadian rhythms) of various metabolic and hormonal functions that control insulin and glucose and regulate appetite. If we don't get enough sleep these functions are disrupted and this can result in increased weight and poor health.

## Common sleep problems

Not everyone is able to get enough sleep and this can be due to some common problems.

**Sleep apnoea** occurs when the throat or upper airway is obstructed and causes the person to stop breathing for short periods of time. Breathing restarts when the person wakes, but this may be for such a short time that the person is not aware of waking. This waking can happen hundreds of times each night resulting in lack of sleep time. Sleep apnoea is more common in men, but women and children also can experience this. People who are overweight are more likely to have sleep apnoea.

**Restricted sleep** or frequent lack of sleep can be caused by a number of things including health problems, the need to urinate in the night, restless leg syndrome, social or work patterns that reduce sleep time and using TVs or other bright-lit electronic technology in bed that over-stimulates the brain.

Shift Work can upset the normal circadian rhythms that synchronise our sleep to the night/day cycle, making it harder to get enough sleep.

**Insomnia** is regular and frequent trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, waking too early in the morning and worrying about being able to sleep. Insomnia can be caused by medication or other drugs, alcohol and caffeine, chronic pain or other health problems and stress or anxiety.

## Getting help

Some sleep problems can require professional help, but trying the Tips for Good Sleep might be a good start. A healthy lifestyle, not smoking, limiting alcohol, eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise will help with sleep.

Speak to your doctor or health professional if you are concerned about your or your families' sleep. The following websites have additional helpful information.

### Adelaide Institute for Sleep

<http://www.adelaidesleephealth.org.au>

### SA Child & Youth Health Services

[www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)

### SA Health – Healthy Living

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)

### Sleep Health Foundation

[www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

### Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

## For more information

### SA Health

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)

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# Good Sleep = Good Health



- > the importance of sleep
- > tips for a good night's sleep
- > the health benefits of sleep



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# Sleep is important

When we sleep well we are happier, more alert and energetic, better able to concentrate and less likely to make mistakes.

Sleep is an important biological function without which we cannot survive. While we sleep many important functions take place such as physical recovery and repair, brain development, cardiac function and body metabolism. Sleep also assists learning, memory and mood. Sleep is especially important for children's growth and general health. Babies and children need much more sleep than adults.

Without enough sleep we are more likely to have problems with thinking, concentration, memory, reaction times and mood, all of which impact on our ability to perform our daily tasks and increases risks of mistakes and accidents.

Insufficient sleep can be deadly and is a common cause of road and workplace accidents. It is now well known that regular lack of, or poor quality sleep contributes to long-term health problems such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and poor mental health.

Getting enough sleep every night is as important as eating healthily, getting plenty of exercise, not smoking and limiting alcohol to help maintain good health and reduce the risk of disease.

## How much sleep is enough?

Babies and young children need more sleep - as much as 14 hours per day. As we get older we need less sleep, but teenagers should still get 8 – 10 hours each night and adults between 7 and 9 hours.

## Tips for good sleep

We all have times where we don't get enough sleep, but if this is a frequent problem it can have serious effects on our health, safety and wellbeing. Fortunately there are things we can do at all ages to help get a good night's sleep:

- > have a good routine - go to bed at night and get up in the morning at about the same time if possible
- > relax prior to going to bed and don't go to bed until you feel ready to sleep
- > get plenty of exercise, but not in the hours close to bed time
- > avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine, smoking or eating large meals 4-6 hours before bed time
- > maintain a healthy weight
- > avoid using computers, tablets or other bright-lit devices one hour prior to bed time
- > don't watch TV or use computers and other electronic technology in bed
- > have a comfortable bed and bedroom – dark and quiet and not too warm or too cold
- > if you can't get to sleep - get up and go to another room until you feel sleepy.

**Children** also benefit from a regular sleep routine and need to relax before bed time and avoid boisterous play. Sleep may be improved by:

- > playing outside in daylight hours. This is important for biological rhythm regulation and also helps tire children
- > napping less as children get older (about 3 years). If naps occur after 4:00pm this will make getting to sleep later more difficult
- > avoiding being overtired which can make it harder for children to settle for sleep
- > managing bed-time behaviour problems such as refusing to go to bed or getting out of bed before they become a habit.

**Teenagers** start to go to bed later and their sleep patterns change, especially on the weekends! It is still important for them to get enough sleep and regular sleep patterns that don't vary too much on the weekend help ensure enough sleep. Suggestions to improve sleep include:

- > avoid late-night work / home-work / sport on school nights
- > exercise earlier in the day or early evening.

**Shift Workers** are working during times that our bodies expect to be sleeping. Getting enough quality sleep can be a problem for people who work shift work and as their work often involves high risk activities (driving, emergency services, medical services) it is important that the risks of mistakes and accidents are minimised by getting sufficient sleep. Shift workers should:

- > turn off phones and let people know not to disturb you
- > avoid bright sunshine and exercise too close to bed time
- > sleep before a shift rather than after if possible
- > try to establish regular sleep routines that fit with your work shifts if possible.