



The importance of sleep

Fact sheet for employers

Sleep is essential for our health and wellbeing. When we sleep, our brain and body recover and repair, preparing for the next day.

Good sleep allows us to show up as the best friend, partner, family member and colleague we can be. It supports us to be our best selves.

Understanding sleep

Adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. Good quality sleep helps us recover from life's demands, it helps prepares our bodies to cope physically, cognitively and emotionally for the next day

Common sleep problems include:

- insomnia
- sleep apnoea
- over-reliance on sleep medication
- day-time sleepiness
- general difficulty sleeping (falling asleep or remaining asleep).

Why your employees' sleep matters

Poor quality sleep, or lack of sleep, can lead to employees having:

- 1.62 times higher risk of being injured at work
- reduced concentration, ability to assess complex situations, focus and reaction time
- reduced productivity
- reduced emotional control
- increased presenteeism and absenteeism
- increased risk of physical (i.e., cardiovascular disease) and psychological (i.e., depression) health issues.

Work conditions that can lead to poor sleep

- non-standard work hours (after 5pm and before 8am) and shift work (disturbs the circadian rhythm, our sleep/wake cycle)
- prolonged or intense mental or physical activity
- work overload (demands exceed capacity)
- repetitive work
- decision-making authority (low control over job decisions).

As an employer, what can you do?

Promote healthy sleep

As an employer it is important to be aware of the importance of sleep and help promote good sleep habits

- encourage communication between employees and management about the impacts of not enough or poor sleep
- create a positive culture around investing in sleep. We applaud people who exercise and eat well, we should applaud people who invest in sleep
- educate your employees on good sleep practices (sleep hygiene).

Improving your sleep

Sleep Hygiene

During the day

Light - Exposure to light lets the brain send signals to raise body temperature and produce hormones like cortisol (our wakefulness hormone)

- Let as much light into your home and workspace as possible during the day
- Spend time outside, get some sunshine, and fresh air during your day
- If you are a night shift worker, consider if the lighting you have is adequate.

Physical activity - Exercise might not resolve sleep issue, however it is known to have a positive effect

- Both aerobic and resistance exercise can be effective. The recommended level of exercise is 3 sessions per week, of at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise ... so think about where could you walk rather than jump in the car? Can you take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator? Catch up with friends for a walk rather than heading out for lunch?

Nutrition - We can't eat our way to better sleep, but we can eat our way to bad sleep...

- Avoid:
 - Alcohol. This might initially act as a sedative and help you fall asleep, but studies show that later at night, in the second half of your sleep, this acts as a sleep disrupter.
 - Eating a big meal before bedtime, particularly if you have acid reflux. It can take 2-3 hours to digest a meal, and this can disrupt our sleep.
 - Caffeine before bedtime. It is a stimulant, it can make you feel wired, and it can disrupt our circadian rhythm. Some studies show that caffeine even 6 hours before bed can disrupt our sleep by up to 1 hour.
 - Spicy foods before bedtime. These can cause heartburn and bloating and make it difficult to sleep.
 - High fat foods. These are linked to fragmented sleep, and day time sleepiness, and this is something often found in our overweight and obese population.
- There are key foods with nutrients that provide building block for good sleep. These are foods that contain:
 - Magnesium found in nuts, seeds, leafy green and bananas
 - B6 vitamin found in fish, beans and poultry
 - Tryptophan found in chickpeas, seaweed, egg whites, pumpkin seeds and turkey
 - Melatonin rich in cherries.

Before bedtime

- Stop working or studying 30 minutes before bedtime. Give yourself some time to wind down before sleep
- Remove technology
 - Turn off your TV and computer. Don't read from your iPad or backlit device.
 - This is because the blue light on devices suppresses the production of melatonin which is the key hormone that controls our body clock day-night cycle
- Take a bath or shower, this will slow your body system down and prepare you for sleep
- Change your bright light bulbs to low wattage bulbs in your bedroom
- Make your room dark at sleep time. Block windows, wear an eye mask, remove electrical clocks
- Get comfy
 - Have a comfortable mattress and pillow
 - Wear something you feel comfortable and relaxed in - make sure you distinguish between day clothes and sleepwear
- Try to go to bed at the same time - going to bed earlier than this won't be the right time for "deep sleep" due to our body clock
- Keep your room cool and quiet - if you're too hot you won't sleep as well

If you are a shift worker, it may also be helpful to:

- Wear dark glasses to block out the sunlight on your way home. If you can, keep to the same bedtime and wake time schedule, even on weekends.

If you can't sleep

- Staying in bed if you are restless, worrying or and anxious won't help, so it may be helpful to concentrate on something else
- Do something else, knit; have a warm bath, read (not on a device), do a crossword puzzle
- Go back to bed when you feel sleepy and more relaxed
- Repeat the process if you need to
- Try not to catastrophise about sleep. It is ok miss some sleep. Try to make it up the next night, or that week. Think of sleep like a piggy bank. Think of "sleep debt," like a bank account - it may be ok to deplete your balance briefly, as long as you can easily replenish the funds before penalties start to accrue and become too difficult to pay back

Most people who struggle to sleep do not suffer from a sleep disorder. But if you are worried talk to your GP.

Useful Resources

Sleep health foundation Australia - (02) 8814 8655

<https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/all-sleep-factsheets-a-z>

Better Health Channel - Vic Gov

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/sleep-hygiene>

Sleep Foundation

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>

Fair Work Australia

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employee-entitlements/hours-of-work-breaks-and-rosters>

icare

Getting good sleep - poster

Setting up your sleep routine for success - Take home guide

