

# A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sleep is a vital ingredient for good mental and physical health. When we are sleeping, we pack away information from our day and provide our body and mind with time to restore.

Poor sleep, however, impacts our:

- physical abilities
- memory and learning
- mood, and
- ability to think

If you are suffering at the moment from poor sleep, then you're not alone. Inadequate sleep is one of the most problematic issues of contemporary life. Disrupted sleep over an extended time may contribute to ongoing sleep problems, or a new pattern of sleep – managing sleep hygiene early and effectively can reset this pattern and lead to better sleep.

## What can I do about getting a good night's sleep?

Good sleep is achievable but it takes practice.

Establishing a bedtime routine teaches your brain that it is time to go to bed. Your routine may need to begin 30 to 60 minutes before you want to go to bed and includes creating the right environment and preparations for calming your brain and body down.

Your routine could include:

- A regular time for preparing for bed
- Dimming lights
- Avoiding computer and phone screens
- Warm milk or soothing tea such as camomile.
- Calm activity outside of the bedroom such as reading a book or listening to music
- Spending quiet time with a pet
- Cleaning teeth
- Breathing or mindfulness routines that signal to the brain that you are preparing to sleep
- Writing down the plan for the following day so you stop thinking about it in bed
- A cool environment will help reduce body temperature which helps sleep.

The don'ts that keep the brain awake include:

- Lots of coffee or high energy caffeine drinks during the day and night
- TV, lap tops and mobile phones in bed
- Alcohol, as it interferes with the restorative function of sleep



- Energetic exercise before sleep
- A large meal before sleep
- An unmade bed with wrinkled sheets
- Bright light, especially in the bedroom.
- Late night arguments
- Varying bed times - late nights and sleep-ins on weekends upset the routine needed for the brain to learn the time for sleep

If you wake up during the night, staying in bed will not help the brain with the idea that the bed is for sleep. If you can't sleep, and you find you are thinking or worrying, then get up and leave the bedroom until you feel tired and ready to sleep again. Keeping the brain bored while you are out of bed helps to encourage sleep. This might include maintaining low lights, drinking a cup of tea and staying calm and quiet until you're ready to sleep again.

It is also important to establish a consistent wake up time - even when you may not have had enough sleep the night before. Maintaining the same time for rising helps your sleep routine and teaches your brain the habits required to maintain a good sleeping pattern.

## Open Arms Sleeping Better Program

The Open Arms' *Sleeping Better* program was developed in response to the high prevalence of sleep issues in the veteran community, and the potential adverse impact sleep issues have on individuals and their families.

*Sleeping Better* is offered in a 2-day or 7- weekly session format to veterans and eligible family members. The value of the group process is that as people discover they are not alone with the sleep issues, they can provide support to each other as the group develops.

Participants are introduced to practical measures such as maintaining a sleep diary, establishing SMART goals, and practicing mindfulness.

Topics covered include understanding sleep and sleep problems; sleep hygiene; arousal, stress and sleep; reducing worry in bed; stimulus control; and relapse prevention.

Clients often benefit most from attendance in conjunction with individual counselling, or attendance at other group treatment programs with associated issues such as anxiety, anger, depression and trauma recovery. Clients don't have to be receiving other Open Arms services to benefit from our group programs.

For more information on Sleeping Better workshops happening in your region please visit <https://www.openarms.gov.au/get-support/group-treatment-programs-and-educational-workshops>

*Note: The content of the Sleeping Better program is based on a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) model and delivery is based on best practice principles.*



Sources:

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

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

<https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/>