



Personal Tool

Sleep, set yourself up for success

This tool was created by one of our senior clinical team members, Kate McPhee, Psychologist & Clinical Associate Coordinator at AccessEAP.

Sleep. We all do it, and yet if you ask three people about how they maintain it – you will probably get three different answers. Sleep is important for so many parts of our lives and is often labelled the king when thinking about mental health, productivity and general life satisfaction. But if we were to ask you about how much sleep you get in a night (and asked you to be honest) – would you really say 8 hours? If I think about myself (and even the people I hang out with) – the answer would be closer to “I am happy with whatever I get!”. There are times when our sleep is going to be both better and worse and this often depends on current stress levels, diet and living circumstances. The focus of this tool is to encourage an audit on sleep patterns, sleep hygiene and sleep habits. Do not feel alone in a rocky night’s sleep – it is estimated that in Australia, a high proportion struggle to get to sleep¹. This can range from symptoms that prevent people from falling asleep to waking up in the middle of the night and struggling to get back to sleep to something more chronic and then combining to increase the severity of conditions like hypertension, obesity and breathing issues.

It appears that sleep disorders are related to mood disorders (like anxiety and depression), so working on one will automatically improve the other. This is good news as it is important to get a strong handle on any mental health condition so that we can not only survive but thrive.

Sleep hygiene is about keeping the bed that you sleep in free from technology, reading, drinking tea/alcohol and any other activities². This is because the brain is highly aware (!) and remembers a place that we check our emails, watch Netflix or have breakfast in bed. The brain will find it difficult to shut off unless there are cues to remind it. Sleep hygiene is also about training the brain to shut off and pick up on these cues.

In our role as mental health professionals, we have given numerous pieces of advice around sleep and recognise that many are hard to implement into everyday life. Our tips today are designed to be implemented today and added to as the days become weeks. Good sleep is also like good fitness - the way to maintain it is to keep at it and adapt when things get difficult.

Set yourself up for success. Clear from the bedroom televisions, phones and tablets. It should only be for intimacy and sleep. Minimize exposure to blue lights on tablets, smartphones and laptops. This tricks the brain into thinking that it is daylight. Access your settings and set your night mode from sunset all the way through to sunrise.

Turn off your technology two hours before going to sleep. Read books, play instruments or paint/colour instead. Many clients of mine wear yellow glasses to counteract the days level of blue light and rave about the successes of sleeping after this. Get educated about sleep. Good sleep, like good health, is more than good luck - it is more like good management.



Spend some time reading and learning about sleep. Get to know your triggers and what works for you.

Set yourself a bedtime and wake up time that is both realistic and gives you enough sleep. Counting back eight hours from when you need to get up may be the best strategy. However, setting a time that means you will be in bed by a certain time (and practising getting to sleep) is a good start.

Get some sunshine into your day. It appears that the sleep disorders that are appearing now are related to our lack of daily activity and exposure to sunlight. To increase the amount of sunshine in your day - eat your lunch outside, get off a train station early and walk, sit near the window and/or read in or near the sun.



Reduce caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and any stimulants to assist sleep.

Improve and maintain your diet as this impacts our ability to fall asleep, stay asleep and the quality of sleep. Better diet = better sleep.

Clear out your head, preferably two hours before attempting to get to sleep. Look at your diary and think about three things that can be done first thing to enhance your day. Write them down and then put them in as appointments in your diary – then forget. Concentrating on the present will assist you in relaxing and sleeping.



When trying to get to sleep – focus on slowing down the breath and shutting off the brain. If you wake during the night again, focus on letting all thoughts go as you have planned for your next day, and in the daylight hours it is always easier to plan. If the sleep still alludes you, try counting back down from 300 by 3.

Most of all – keep persevering. If you are struggling to sleep, remember that you are not alone! This is a common problem, and around 1 in 4 Australians are trying to get a good sleep³. If you are not sure where to start, book yourself in with an EAP counsellor and talk out what may need to happen next. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

¹ <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-tips-to-sleep-better#8.-Dont-drink-alcohol>

² <https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780195329179.001.0001/med-9780195329179-interactive-pdf-023.pdf>

³ <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/high-proportion-of-australians-struggling-with-sleep>

