



Koalas are excellent sleepers and we can learn to sleep like them, without the need to hang ourselves in a gum tree.

Try some of the ideas in this information sheet to help you get a better night's sleep. Use the acronym **ASLEEP** to help you remember our tips.

**A**lcohol, caffeine and nicotine should be avoided

**S**leep and sex should be the only uses of the bed

**L**eave laptops, TV and paperwork out of the bedroom

**E**xercise regularly but not within two to three hours of bedtime

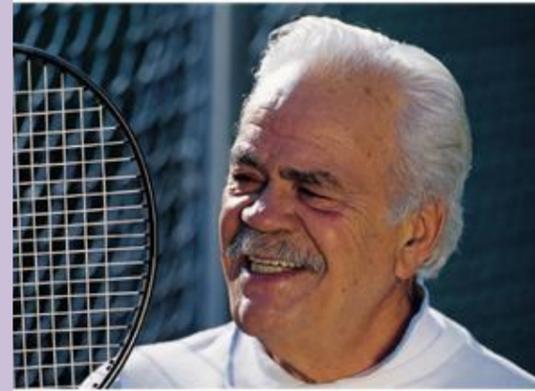
**E**arly rising – avoid sleeping-in or daytime naps

**P**lan for bedtime – by making a bedtime routine such as having a warm drink or a bath

## Exercise

Inadequate sleep over long periods of time is thought to play a part in producing an imbalance of the hormones that regulate appetite.

It is therefore important to try and ensure you do some regular exercise every day to maintain your weight in the healthy weight range. Try Walking, Ta Chi or doing something social and active such as playing golf or tennis during the day or early evening.



## What about sleeping tablets?

It is usually better to deal with sleep difficulties using non-drug methods. Long term use of sleeping tablets is not recommended. Sleeping medication should be used with caution. It must be used under regular medical supervision as many drugs can become addictive. A tolerance can be developed to them after a few days. Then increasingly larger doses are needed to get the same sleeping effect.

When you use sleeping tablets the natural rhythm of your sleep is not as deep or as restful.

You may experience side effects such as drowsiness, dizziness, memory loss and poor concentration. Sometimes some effects may continue into the next day, making it difficult to function especially if you are juggling working and caring.

In older people sleeping tablets increase the risk of falling. Sleeping tablets can be addictive, so coming off them becomes harder the longer you take them.

Talk to your GP if you have been taking sleeping tablets for a while and want to come off them.

Your GP can find information to assist you with this at:  
[http://www.nps.org.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/72160/OKA9215-NPS-Reduction-Plan-for-Sleeping-Tablets-Fact-Sheet\\_V3.pdf](http://www.nps.org.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/72160/OKA9215-NPS-Reduction-Plan-for-Sleeping-Tablets-Fact-Sheet_V3.pdf)

1

# Getting a Good night's sleep...

## Sleep problems are treatable or able to be managed

It's important that you see your bed as a space just for sleeping.

If you watch TV, listen to music, read a book, or have conversations about worries in bed you won't associate your bed with drowsiness and sleep but with wakefulness and alertness.

If after 20 minutes, you find you still cannot get to sleep try leaving the bedroom and doing something boring or relaxing until you feel sleepy again.



## Sleep difficulties are a common problem for carers

Loss of sleep for carers usually causes fatigue, stress and difficulty coping with the tasks carers have to get through during the day.

Sleep deprivation for carers that are also in paid employment can impact on the quality of their work.

Sleeping problems are best addressed by being aware of the normal processes involved in going to sleep and using this information to help you readjust to a suitable sleep pattern.

Our sleep-wake cycle is influenced by the day/night cycle and our daily routines. Our circadian rhythm is our body's internal clock regulation system that covers a 24 hour cycle. Around seven to eight hours of sleep a night is optimal for good health.

Our body clock ensures our chemical, hormonal production and metabolism are refreshed while we sleep.

## This issue

Improve your sleep environment **P.2**

Tips for Winding down **P.2**

Caffeine **P.3**

Sleeping tablets **P.4**

This is similar to how our computers schedule their 24 hour maintenance tasks and updates.

Sleeping difficulties can be due to:

- A poor sleeping environment
- Being unable to unwind (anxiety)
- Daytime napping
- Taking common stimulant drugs such as caffeine and nicotine
- Night time drinking
- Bladder problems
- The effects of ageing
- Sleep Pattern disturbance



## Improve your Sleeping environment

### Darken your bedroom

A light room will make it harder to sleep. Put up dark curtains or blinds. This will reduce disturbance by sensor lights (that come on due to movement), street lights, moonlight and the early morning sun. You might also try wearing an airline eye mask aid.

### Reduce Noise

Noisy neighbours, air conditioner noise and traffic sounds can all interfere with getting to sleep. Close windows and doors and/or wear earplugs to reduce all sounds. This is essential if you do shift work and must sleep in the day.

Family/ household members who snore should be encouraged to lose weight, cut back on alcohol and sleep on their side to reduce snoring. A visit to their GP to make sure the snoring is not a sign of sleep apnea is also a must.

### Temperature

Ensure you are comfortable while sleeping; Use a fan if you are too hot, If you are cold use more bed covers.

## Wind down to reduce Anxiety

Start a wind down routine. Some of the following ideas are a guide.

30 minutes before you go to bed drink:

- Warm milk with honey
- Valerian or another decaffeinated tea.
- Chamomile tea. However people taking anti-coagulants should avoid this tea.

Foods such as milk, bananas, honey, turkey, and tuna contain tryptophan (an amino acid), may help you get to sleep.

Try eating a small amount of these foods or a small banana honey milkshake prior to bed-time.

Encourage your body to relax by practicing:

- muscle relaxation,
- breathing exercises,
- simple stretching or
- listening to music

You don't have to sit cross-legged on the floor. You can sit quietly in a chair or move around.

Doing daily practice of something at the same time can help you develop a regular habit.

## Meditation



Common ways to start are

- *Repeating a sound (A mantra)*
- *Focusing on breathing*
- *Focusing on an object (e.g. A painting, tree, or candle)*

Often you can combine different focusing techniques for the mind. e.g. as you focus on breathing in and out you can also count 1, 2, 3, 4. Or you can swap this to chant "calm" or "relax" to yourself.

- You can teach yourself meditation
- You can attend a class and learn in a group from an experienced teacher
- Your local library can give you class details

### Interested in meditation?

The ABC has a helpful beginner's mediation toolkit. See <http://www.abc.net.au/radio-national/programs/lifematters/features/meditation-toolkit/>

## Develop a bedtime routine and try it out .....

Set a specific time for going to bed. It's good for kids and adults too.

Your routine should include relaxing and quiet activities before going to bed. It's a way of telling your body it's time to start shutting down for the night.

### Limit Power Naps or daytime Siestas

When you've had a bad night's sleep, it's very tempting to catch up with a nap the next day.

Research findings however suggest napping should only be done for a short time such as 30 – 45 minutes maximum.

Taking longer naps can interfere with night time sleep patterns

If the sleeping problem is due to changes in your circadian rhythm you can help reset your 24 hour cycle by:

- Avoiding daytime naps
- Setting a regular time for going to bed and for waking up
- Delaying bedtime until you feel sleep.

### Avoid Caffeine

Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, coca cola and some over the counter medications.

Caffeine makes:

- it harder to get to sleep
- you sleep for a shorter time
- the amount of deep sleep you have shorter
- you have more 'dream sleep' to start with but less sleep overall.

Avoid drinking caffeine after 4pm.

Caffeine is a diuretic and it can also wake you up to empty your bladder, so it makes sense to cut down your intake at night.



### Be Mindful

Your mind is more active when it has more input. Closing your eyes, tells your brain to switch off.

If you wake up during the night stay in bed and keep your eyes closed. Its better not to get up, as this provides more mental stimulation.

If you find daytime things intrude, try to let your thoughts go by, like watching a balloon going up into the sky.

This isn't as easy as it sounds and may take some practice to master.

Mindfulness training can help you to develop this skill.

Alternatively if you can't let your thoughts go, get a pen and paper and write them down. Then fold the paper and place it under your bed.

Tell yourself that the thoughts will still be there in the morning. You'll feel more able to deal with them after a good night's sleep.

If you feel you are worrying constantly then make an appointment to see a counsellor who may help you address your concerns.

Carers NSW provides free counselling or your GP may be able to refer you to someone locally.

## Are You a Late TV Watcher?

If you like to watch TV late into the night, consider these alternatives:

- Use your DVD to record your shows. You will be able to get more sleep. An advantage too is you'll be able to view shows uninterrupted by cutting out the ads.
- Use "I View" as an option to avoid staying up so late.

Better quality sleep occurs in the hours before midnight. It's better to go to bed at 10pm and sleep to 6am, than to go to bed at 11pm and sleep till 7am, even though it is the same amount of overall time.

## Avoid too much alcohol

Drinking may help you relax, but excessive alcohol makes it harder to stay asleep and lowers the quality of your sleep.

Women should have only one standard drinks and men two standard drinks.

## Try essential Lavender oil

Put a drop of lavender oil on your pillow or pyjamas or a few drops in your bath. The smell has a calming effect.