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.

**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.


**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.

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.
Improve your sleeping environment

**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**
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, or if you are cold use more bed covers.

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**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 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.**

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**Meditation**

**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.

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**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.

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**Avoid Caffeine**
Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, cocoa 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.**

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**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 drink and men two standard drinks.

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**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.

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**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.

- Alternatively 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.

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

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**Interested in meditation?**