

Good Sleep

An essential element of a healthy lifestyle!

On average, adults need 7–9 hours of sleep a night. However, some people only require four hours and others need ten. Insomnia, the inability to get adequate or good quality sleep, is a common sleep disturbance among adults. Population surveys suggest that insomnia affects around 30% to 45% of the adult population in any one year. Chronic or long-term insomnia has a prevalence of 9% to 12%.¹ Over the course of a lifetime, almost everyone can expect to suffer a sleep disorder.

Significant sleep difficulties can impact on almost every area of your life including healthy living, work performance and relationships. 17 hours without sleep causes similar impairment to a 0.05 blood alcohol level and 24 hours without sleep equates to a 0.10% blood alcohol level.²

How Sleep Works: Your Body Clock

The body has two ways to control your sleep;

- a brain chemical called adenosine, and
- your body clock.

Adenosine, a natural chemical, builds up in your body over many hours of being awake, and this tells your brain that it needs to sleep.

Your body clock has two timers controlling body rhythms;

- 24 hour cycles (circadian rhythms)
- 90 minute cycles (ultradian rhythms).

These rhythms affect your alertness, energy and sleep patterns.

Your body responds to a 24 hour pattern of day and night – your circadian rhythm. You are usually most awake at about 9:00am and 9:00pm. The two times when your body most wants to sleep is around 3:00am and 3:00pm.

Individual body clocks may vary, so you need to work out your body rhythm and how it is affected by stress, work and lifestyle factors. eg notice what time you feel tired during the evening and go to bed then. You may miss a wave of sleep if you ignore this tiredness.



¹Morin CM, Hauri PJ, Espie CA, Spielman AJ, Buysse DJ, Bootzin RR. Nonpharmacologic treatment of chronic insomnia. *Sleep*. 1999;22:1134-1156.

²Nature, Vol 388, July 1997

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You also have a 90 minute body clock, known as your ultradian rhythm. During an eight hour period, most people will have five 90 minute cycles. The sleep cycle starts with two stages of light sleep, followed by two stages of deeper sleep and then a stage of sleep called REM (rapid eye movement) sleep when most dreaming happens. People who have problems sleeping often wake up at 90 minute periods ie at the end of a sleep cycle, when they are in a light stage of sleep and easily disturbed. Your 90 minute body clock affects you even when you are awake. This explains why you have periods during the day when you feel sleepy, which subside after about 30 minutes.

Tips for Improving Sleep

If you genuinely want to experience better sleep, you need to make a commitment to improving it and follow this up with actions to make a difference.

To establish successful restorative sleep, experts suggest:

- Routine - establish a regular schedule. Try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day. Notice when you feel sleepy during the evening and make this your bedtime.
- Environment - create a quiet, comfortable sleep environment. Invest in light blocking, sound-absorbing curtains and a good mattress. Minimise noise and keep the room temperature cool (between 16–18 degrees celcius).
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and can be disruptive to sleep. Alcohol alters sleep patterns so that less “deep

sleep” (stage III and IV) is experienced. Avoid these substances at least 4 hours before going to bed.

- Exercise regularly - Exercise helps you sleep better. Doing vigorous activity before going to bed can keep you awake, so exercise at least three hours before going to sleep.
- Check medications for side effects - such as sleeplessness. Appetite suppressants, some cold and allergy medicines, and certain prescription drugs can cause insomnia.
- Restrict fluid intake - within three hours of bedtime.
- Use your bed only for sleep and sex - experts suggest that you get out of bed if you are having trouble sleeping, move into another room, try reading for 20–30 minutes or listen to soothing music, and return only when you are sleepy again.
- Relax before bedtime - Finish the business of the day at least an hour before going to bed. Wind down by listening to music, reading a book, or meditating.
- Clear your mind – visualise relaxing environments, such as deserted beaches or mountain streams. You may find it helpful to have a “dump pad” by the bed, to write down things you want to remember (so you can get on with the job of sleeping).

>Read the Alere relaxation strategies Fact Sheet for relaxation techniques.

>Alere also offers seminars on Sleep and Fatigue Management and Better Sleep for Shiftworkers.

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Note: Transient or temporary insomnia can result from a variety of causes - family or marital problems, emotional stress, work problems, changes in sleep routines, jet lag, noise, or medication side effects. If you suffer insomnia for more than a few weeks, talk with your Doctor.