

# Improving our Sleep

As we transition to a different way of working, whether it's remote or in a school, it's important to create a daily schedule that includes a consistent wake up time and bedtime. This may be a good opportunity to rethink how we sleep and to create some new healthy sleep habits.

It's key to our health to get a good night sleep. Sleep helps us improve our mental health, and too little sleep could adversely affect our immune system. Being well-rested can assist with a quicker recovery from a cold or illness. During this time of change, also consider: Are you sleeping more than you typically would but wake feeling tired?

Sleep problems are common; 50-70 million U.S. adults have a sleep disorder according to the American Sleep Foundation. If sleep issues persist, it's important to discuss this with your doctor as lack of sleep could result in medical problems. Up to 37.9 percent of adults report unintentionally falling asleep during the day at least once in the previous month, and 47.7 percent report nodding off or falling asleep while driving at least once in the past month.

How much sleep should we be getting every night? Here is some information on recommended sleep broken down by age. Regardless of the recommendations, it is important to evaluate your individual needs so you feel rested and ready to start your day.

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|----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| School-aged children | 6-13 years     | 9 to 11 hours |
| Teenagers            | 14-17 years    | 8 to 10 hours |
| Young adults         | 18-25 years    | 7 to 9 hours  |
| Adults               | 26 to 64 years | 7 to 9 hours  |
| Older adults         | 65 and older   | 7 to 8 hours  |

Data from: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/excessive-sleepiness/support/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need>

When you are experiencing sleep issues, you may wonder with all you need to accomplish in a day, what can you do to improve your sleep? Here are some ideas to increase your sleep quality and ideally experience more energy, improved well-being, and fewer health issues:

- Create a bedtime routine – A routine informs your body that it's time to sleep. Things like: A hot shower or bath, reading (not in your bed), setting a regular bedtime, meditating, or listening to calm music.
- Stop watching anything on your television, tablet, cell phone, etc. while in bed as your body could associate your bed with wakefulness.

- Create a comfortable sleep environment – Cool temperature, darkness, low noise, and a supportive mattress.
- Get physical – Exercising for at least 30 minutes, three times a week can help improve sleep. Exercising less than two hours before bedtime may interfere with sleep.
- Unwind and relax – You could try out some new apps such as DeStressify, Breathe, Calm, Omvana, Mindfulness Daily, or Smiling Mind.
- Avoid caffeine for at least four hours before bedtime. Some sleep research suggests no caffeine after 12 p.m.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before bedtime – Although alcohol can promote drowsiness and is a depressant, it also may cause restless sleep and could deprive you of necessary REM sleep.
- Skip the nap. This may help with better nighttime sleep for adults.
- Keep a piece of paper, notepad and pencil next to your bed so you can write down thoughts that wake you up at night. Tell yourself you have written them down so you don't need to keep thinking of them.
- Get out of bed – Don't stay in your bed if you are still awake 20-30 minutes after going to bed. Have a calm, quiet area ready to sit in until you feel sleepy again. In your quiet space, stay away from technology and have a calm, soothing activity you can do (i.e. reading, puzzle, drawing, or journaling). Some other options you can try are doing a meditation, taking a warm shower, or drinking a decaffeinated drink.

By being consistent with your sleep patterns and having patience with yourself, your amount of sleep and sleep quality can improve over time. Try a sleep log to track your improvements. ([https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/sample\\_sleep\\_log-by\\_national\\_sleep\\_foundation.pdf](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/sample_sleep_log-by_national_sleep_foundation.pdf)).

Adapted from <https://www.sleepassociation.org/about-sleep/sleep-statistics/>, AnxietyBC, and

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-sleep-affects-your-immunity>