

Sleep Hygiene



Why is sleep hygiene important?:

Obtaining healthy sleep is important for both physical and mental health, improving productivity and overall quality of life. Everyone, from children to older adults, can benefit from better sleep, and sleep hygiene can play a key part in achieving that goal.

Research has demonstrated that forming good habits is a central part of health. Crafting sustainable and beneficial routines makes healthy behaviours feel almost automatic, creating an ongoing process of positive reinforcement. On the flip side, bad habits can become engrained even as they cause negative consequences.

Thankfully, humans have an impressive ability to make our habits serve our long-term interests. Building an environment and set of routines that promote our goals can really pay off.

Sleep hygiene encompasses both environment and habits, and it can pave the way for higher-quality sleep and better overall health.

Improving sleep hygiene has little cost and virtually no risk, making it an important part of a public health strategy to counteract the serious problems of insufficient sleep and insomnia in America.

In sum, sleep hygiene is important for:

- Allowing the mind and body to recharge
- Making you feel refreshed when you wake up
- Optimising brain functioning
- Emotional regulation
- Ensures that we sleep at the right time (in the evening) so that we get enough sunlight exposure during the day
- Getting all different stages of sleep (the different stages are important for different roles, for example REM sleep is deep sleep)
- Without sleep, there are a number of repercussions (e.g lack of attention, lack of concentration, delayed reactions, mood shifts. Drowsiness, poor mental health. There is also a link to health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke)
- Improving mental health and vice versa. Lack of sleep can lead to poor mental health. Poor mental health can negatively impact on sleep.

What effects can poor sleep have on a child's mental health and behaviour:

- Feeling more frustrated
- Mood shifts
- Irritability
- Aggression
- We also might overreact (e.g if things don't go our way)
- Lack of ability to regulate emotions (being tearful at the slightest thing)
- Lack of attention
- Lack of concentration
- Delayed reactions
- Drowsiness

What can we implement to aid better sleep:

SET YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

- 1) **Have a fixed wake up time** (for week days and weekends) – this helps us to get into a 'rhythm' of sleep.
- 2) **Make gradual adjustments** – if you want to shift your sleep times, you can do this in small increments. However, it is not always going to work straight away, so we must have that expectation. Try to get the routine in place first, and then introduce the gradual change in sleep time. If your child is used to going to sleep at 1am, shifting this to 9pm is going to be way too early for their 'sleep rhythm. It will take time but together with the steps below it will become easier but it is not a quick fix.
- 3) **Try not to nap** – these can be useful during the day but it can throw off our sleep at night. Try to avoid napping to ensure we feel tired enough to sleep in the evening.

FOLLOW A NIGHT TIME ROUTINE

- 1) **The key is consistency** - without consistency, there is no routine. Without routine, a sleep routine is hard to implement.
- 2) **Budget 30 minutes for winding down** – take advantage of whatever makes you feel calm (e.g music, reading, stretching, relaxation exercises, audiobook)
- 3) **Dim your lights** – bright lights can decrease the production of melatonin and can hinder sleep due to replicating the effects of sunlight. Melatonin is needed for sleep.

- 4) **Unplug from electronics and reduce screen time!!!** – Blue light from screens (TV, phone, laptops etc) replicates light from the sun. It reduces melatonin production which helps us sleep. Reducing exposure should increase ability to sleep.
- 5) **Test methods of relaxation** – instead of your goal being ‘falling asleep quicker’ it is often easier to focus on strategies that make us feel relaxed. Meditation, mindfulness, paced breathing, and other relaxation strategies can put you in the right mindset for bed.
- 6) **Try not to toss and turn** – it helps to have a healthy mental connection between being in bed and actually being asleep. For that reason, if you haven’t gotten to sleep, get up, do your relaxation, meditation or whatever activity you like to do again, before trying to fall asleep again. This helps with the consistency and routine aspect of night time routines too.

CULTIVATE DAILY HEALTHY HABBITS

- 1) **Increase bright light exposure during the day** – especially sunlight. Again this is important to reinforce our sleep rhythms that can encourage sleep.
- 2) **Increase exercise** – Exercise combats stress hormones in the body. The more stress hormones we have, the less sleep hormones (like melatonin) the body produces as they counteract each other. Exercise allows for stress hormones to be reduced, meaning that when it comes round to sleeping we have regular levels of melatonin in our body to aid sleep.
- 3) **Watch what you are consuming (food and drink)** – high sugar food/drinks and stimulants like coffee all impact our sleep negatively. Try not to eat close to bed time, and set a deadline for drinking caffeinated/high sugar drinks throughout the day (e.g 3pm).
- 4) **Don’t dine late** – eating dinner late can mean that you are digesting food whilst trying to sleep. This food has provided the body with energy, meaning that it will struggle to wind down.
- 5) **Restrict in bed activity** – to build up the mind connection between bed and sleep, reducing our in bed activity is crucial for building this connection. Try to use your bed for sleep only – so try to avoid lying on your bed, watching TV in bed etc throughout the day.

OPTIMISE YOUR BEDROOM

- 1) Have a comfortable mattress and pillow.
- 2) Ensure that the bedding meets any sensory needs (e.g fluffy duvet, weighted blankets, shape of pillow etc).

- 3) Regulate the temperature in the room (e.g using a fan, opening windows, using hot water bottles. If you don't have a hot water bottle you can put rice in a sock, tie it up, and then heat it in the microwave).
- 4) Block out light (e.g thick curtains or extra covers e.g towels on blinds to block out the light)
- 5) Draw out noise (use ear plugs, white noise or even a fan to drown out noise)
- 6) Try calming scents— again, it is possible to associate smells with sleep and can help us to enforce a routine.
- 7) Think about lighting – use a dim light when it comes to sleeping. You can try a lava lamp, glow in the dark stars etc. Again, a bright light will replicate the light we get from the sun and therefore could keep us awake.

MAIN TIPS:

PARENTS - When trying to encourage a sleep routine, it is really important that the young person understands what you are trying to help them to enforce. They too should understand why we need sleep, how it impacts us during the day, what a sleep routine looks like and what works for them.

We would advise doing this **collaboratively** with a young person. To assist in their understanding, a **sleep diary** can be used. They are useful to identify sleep patterns and what things are missing in their sleep routine that can be implemented.

To complete a sleep diary, consider the following:

- Complete it honestly – there is no judgement!
- Needs to be kept for 2 weeks to look for patterns
- Keep by the bed to make it easier to fill in. It can be hard to remember details the next day.
- If your child sleeps elsewhere e.g. other parent, grandparents or respite make sure they fill it in too
- Don't use it if it feels overwhelming