

# Sleep Strategies

Some suggestions to help with your sleep are as follows:

Try to have a regular waking time (despite the quality of sleep during the night). Get out of bed and start your day at this time.

At night time, only get into bed when you are sleepy and you are ready to sleep. A regular morning waking time will help you to get sleepy at night, and at a more consistent time.

Natural sunlight exposure first thing in the morning for 30-60 minutes (without sunglasses) helps you to feel wakeful during the day and for you to become sleepy at night time. Daily moderate exercise is also important (enough to feel a bit puffed and sweaty) and the morning can be an ideal time to do this as you can get your light exposure at the same time.

It is important to avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, coke, energy drinks) as these make it hard for you to fall asleep but also reduce the time you spend in deep quality sleep throughout the night. If you are taking more than 1-2 cups per day reduce caffeine gradually in order to minimise caffeine withdrawal headaches.

It is important to avoid computer screens/iPads/iPhones in the 2 hours before bedtime as the particular light that is emitted from these screens can delay the release of the natural hormone melatonin which helps us fall asleep. Try to keep the lights dim (e.g. by using lamps rather than overhead lights) in the hour before bed to help with this also (bright light can wake up the brain and delay melatonin release).

It is important that the bed and bedroom are for sleep only - no TV, computer, work, worrying, etc. This helps to retrain the brain that being in bed = sleeping time. Make sure your bedroom is very dark and is comfortable and quiet. Avoid looking at a clock overnight as this light source can wake up the brain and cause frustration and anxiety.

Create a pre-bed ritual for yourself that you do every night. It is helpful to include restful activities and relaxation strategies to help wind down the body and brain. Keeping consistent with a pre-bed routine can help train the brain that bedtime is approaching.

It is important to try and practice calming and relaxation strategies as the mood or state we are in during the day carries on through the night. Therefore, if you are stressed, it will be much easier for your brain to switch into full on awake mode during any night awakenings. If you are more relaxed, even if you do awake, it will be easier for you to fall back to sleep. These strategies can be practiced as a part of your pre-bed routine. Examples are progressive muscle relaxation and breathing exercises. Audio files to guide you through these are available at the CALM website: [www.calm.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz).

If you do find yourself lying awake in bed for more than 15-20 minutes try getting out of bed and going to another room where it is comfortable. Keep the lights dim and do something distracting and relaxing such as light, enjoyable reading. When you feel sleepy again, you may go back to bed but not before. This helps to strengthen the association between bed=sleep and helps to minimise the frustrating cycle of lying in bed awake.

It is possible to become tolerant to medication such as Zopiclone meaning that you need increased

doses to obtain the sleep effect. Half to one tablet is a usual dose. It is also important not to combine sleeping medication with alcohol. Alcohol does also reduce sleep quality and lead to night time awakening. If you do need to take sleeping medication it is often better to plan three nights per week where you will take the medication and the other nights without. This helps to avoid tolerance and dependence but gives you the 'rescue' of getting some nights of solid sleep whilst the other techniques are building up their effect.