

# Sleep - What I Need to Know

## Why is sleep important?

Whilst you are asleep your body carries out many important tasks, including:

- Fixing muscle that has been damaged.
- Dealing with waste products that build up in the body during the day.
- It can improve your mood, as reward chemicals are released during sleep.
- It helps with learning and the creation of memories.

Both the amount of sleep you get and the quality of the sleep are vital.

If you don't get enough sleep this can cause stress hormone levels to rise. This leads to an increase in blood glucose, insulin levels, blood pressure, and damage in the body (inflammation). If this isn't addressed it can cause weight gain, and increase the risk of long-term health problems.

Not getting enough good quality sleep can also increase hunger and lead to more snacking. The foods people opt for when they are tired are usually ultra-processed junk foods.

Stress can affect our sleep, and a lack of good quality sleep can increase stress levels. This can become a vicious cycle if nothing is done to try and stop it.



## What can we do to improve sleep?

Some tips to improve your sleep include:

- Making the room as dark as possible.
- Sleeping in loose fitting clothes.
- Having a regular sleeping pattern (aim for seven to nine hours per night).
- Keeping your bedroom cool.
- Staying hydrated, but avoiding drinking excessive amounts in the evening.
- Not using laptops, tablets or phones, or watching television, just before bed.
- Avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening. For some people it is best to avoid caffeine entirely after midday.
- Not taking long daytime naps.
- Exercising regularly (though exercising too late in the evening may not help, as it can increase adrenaline levels).
- Getting out in the daylight for at least 10-20 minutes in the morning, to help your body's internal clock work better.
- Trying to relax before bed. A hot bath or shower can help, and can also lower your core body temperature. This can have further benefits for sleep.
- Some people see benefits from taking a magnesium supplement.

If you do wake up during the night, try not to clock-watch. If you are still awake after a little while, take part in a quiet activity, such as reading, until you feel tired again.

If you are still struggling to sleep after trying some of these things, it may be worth talking to your healthcare team about it.

### Further info:

[www.thesleepcharity.org.uk](http://www.thesleepcharity.org.uk)

[www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-tips-to-sleep-better](http://www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-tips-to-sleep-better)

This topic is explored further on X-PERT programmes and in X-PERT Handbooks.  
For more information, visit [www.xperthealth.org.uk](http://www.xperthealth.org.uk).