



# Get the *sleep* you need

*Sleep is nature's nurse, renewing us for another round the next day. Naturopath Caroline Robertson shows you how to get enough shut-eye to boost beauty, brain health, and longevity.*

**W**HY do we spend around a third of our life sleeping? We need sleep to recharge, retain information, perform tasks, develop insights, process emotions, re-pattern neurological pathways, and modulate hormones for growth, repair, and balance. Insufficient sleep is linked to cancer, diabetes, heart attack, hypertension, obesity, reflux, respiratory diseases, stroke, and failure to thrive. Without enough sleep, the brain raises the appetite stimulant ghrelin, increases insulin, and decreases restorative growth hormone.

A sleep debt epidemic affects 45% of Australian adults, according to a 2016 Sleep Health Survey - this has serious health, social and economic costs. Less sleep makes us moody, uncoordinated, unintelligent, unattractive, overweight, lethargic, accident-prone, forgetful, tense, confused, depressed, delusional, and

sick. Fatigue lowers libido, stamina, memory, concentration, and creativity. Sleep deprivation can be deadly. Studies show sleeping for less than 6 to 8 hours a night increases the risk of early death by about 12%. Alarmingly, 20% of participants in the 2016 Australian Sleep Health Survey admitted to dozing off while driving and 5% had had an accident in the past year because they nodded off.

### Snooze or lose

Any sunken-eyed new parent or shift worker knows: sleep scarcity is hell. Sleep deficiency comes in many frustrating forms. It may be due to taking ages to fall asleep, or to frequent waking, rousing early, inability to return to sleep, and poor quality sleep. Factors foiling slumber include illness, a bad sleep routine, sleep apnoea, restless legs, pain, hot flushes, anxiety, use of technological devices, drugs, caffeine, and energy drinks. External influences can be electromagnetic energy, fumes, bedding, bugs, noise, light, animals or people. Perfect sleep is the product of a clear mind, healthy body, moderate exercise, and a sleep-supportive environment. Try the following for a siesta fiesta.

**Sleep deprivation drains our brains, leaving us functionally impaired, as if drunk; it also increases pain and inflammation.**

### Create a better routine

Ayurveda advises arising at sunrise and sleeping before energy surges after 10pm. The initial non-REM sleep phase is the most restorative because cortisol decreases, memory is consolidated, learning is integrated, and parasympathetic rest/digest rules. Avoid exercise, disturbing discussions, work and screen time close to bedtime, as they stimulate the nervous system. Early morning tends to be light, dream-infused REM sleep, where our nervous system is more active and the body restless. Go to bed and wake at the same time. Before bed, affirm you'll get out of bed at a certain time. Choose an alarm that simulates nature sounds and the gradual light of dawn. Get straight out of bed and splash cold water on your face to avoid drifting back.

### Fight insomnia with your fork

Have a moderate breakfast, large lunch, and early small dinner of easily digestible foods. A heavy dinner takes energy to digest, which disturbs

sleep. A light dinner at least three hours before bed lets the stomach settle. Avoid alcohol before bed as it inhibits deep sleep and is a diuretic. Eat a high-protein snack several hours before bed for the l-tryptophan, which is a precursor to sleep-inducing melatonin and serotonin. Foods high in tryptophan include milk, potatoes, sunflower seeds, tomatoes, roasted pumpkin, and turnips. Reduce caffeine, sugar, nicotine, chocolate, cola, amphetamine drugs, alcohol and high-tyramine foods, such as smoked meats, chocolate, spinach, eggplant, wine, and cheese.

### Design a snooze zone

Clear sinuses with steam inhalation, nasal irrigation, and minimal mucus-forming foods. Invest in a comfortable mattress, pillow, and bedding. The best bed is firm, yet springy enough to support movement during sleep. A pocket-spring mattress on a dense base lets your spine decompress and the discs plump up. Ensure your pillow supports the gap between your head and neck. Pain can be eased with an underlay of eggshell foam, wool, magnets, or a grounded carbon fibre mattress. The room and bedding shouldn't be too hot, as sleep and melatonin

## \*Pillow prescriptions

As Charlotte Bronte said, "A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow." Studies show that insomniacs have elevated cortisol in the middle of the night, when cortisol should be at its lowest. Resolve stresses before bed with journaling, counselling, leisure, exercise, meditation, and relaxing remedies, such as activated B vitamins, magnesium, adaptogenic ashwagandha, ginseng, rhodiola, and liquorice. If the mind mulls over the same thing, try Bach Flower White Chestnut, which quietens repetitive thoughts. Herbal dream remedies are California poppy, chamomile, hops, hypericum, kava kava, lady's slipper, lavender, lemon balm, oats, passion flower, skullcap, tulsi, valerian, vervain and zizyphus. Lulling essential oils are bergamot, cedarwood, clary sage, lavender, mandarin, Roman chamomile, sandalwood, ylang ylang, valerian root and vetiver. To boost low energy, try cordyceps mushroom, ginseng, withania, and co-enzyme Q10. For chronic insomnia, consider consulting a sleep clinic or receiving shirodhara, an Ayurvedic treatment that balances hormones and creates calm.

production is interrupted when the temperature climbs above 22°C. The room should be quiet, aerated, dark, and comfortable, with the head of the bed facing any direction except north and away from power points. Create an EMF-free zone by eliminating devices and pulling the circuit breaker pre-bed. Use an eye mask and earplugs if there is disturbing stimuli. Sleep in separate rooms or beds if your pet or partner disturbs your sleep. Make the bedroom a stress-free sanctuary with sedating scents, sounds, and a salt lamp. Enjoy 'unwind time' at least an hour before bed: organise yourself for tomorrow, dim lights, close curtains, have a shower or lavender bath, sip a soothing tea, listen to mellow music, watch something non-stimulating, brush teeth, stretch, infuse essential oils, meditate, massage your feet, and snuggle into your happy place. \*

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