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Insurance and Care NSW

The importance of sleep

Sleep is essential for our health and wellbeing. It is the time our body, and especially our brain, can recover and repair.

The quantity and quality of the sleep you experience can play a large role in influencing:

- your health (physical and psychological)
- decision making, problem solving and self-control
- work performance
- risk of injury and/or accidents

> Sleep can impact your abilities at work. Work can also impact your ability to sleep.

Common signs of poor sleep include:

- insomnia
- sleep apnoea
- over-reliance on sleep medication
- day-time sleepiness
- general difficulty sleeping (falling asleep or remaining asleep)

What is a good night's sleep?

For adults the appropriate quantity or amount of sleep each night should be between 7-9 hours.

The quality of this 7-9 hours of sleep each night is also very important to consider. Sleep quality refers to:

- how well you sleep
- how quickly you fall asleep, remain asleep and fall back to sleep if awakened
- feeling rested when waking, and throughout the day

Why sleep matters

Sleep deprivation can lead to:

- 1.62 times higher risk of being injured at work
- reduced ability to make good decisions and choices
- reduced productivity
- increased absenteeism
- increased risk of physical (i.e., cardiovascular disease) and psychological (i.e., depression) health issues

Steps to improve your sleep

Considering the powerful effects that sleep can have on your behaviour, below are steps you can take to improve your sleep.

- **Have a routine**
  Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. This will help train your body to become tired at the right time.

- **Avoid caffeine, smoking, and drinking alcohol 6 hours before bed**
  Coffee, some teas, cola drinks, chocolate, and some medications contain caffeine. Along with caffeine, nicotine (found in cigarettes) and alcohol can keep you awake and disrupt your sleep.

- **Avoid screen time before bed**
  The light from your smartphone, tablet, laptop, or TV before bed can delay your body's natural sleep rhythm. This may make it harder to fall asleep and disrupt your sleep quality.

- **Exercise**
  At least 30 minutes of exercise each day can improve your sleep. However, try not to exercise within 4 hours of going to sleep.

- **Keep your bed for sleeping**
  This helps to minimise your association of your bed with wakefulness or daily activities.

- **Try to limit napping**
  Although you should try your best to avoid napping too frequently, it is normal to feel like taking a nap in the afternoon. If you must take a nap, try for about 20 minutes. If you sleep too late in the day or for too long then you might wake up feeling more tired than before.

- **Sleep when you feel tired**
  Give up "trying" to go to bed. If you go to bed when you feel tired, then you will have an easier time falling asleep.

- **Use stress management strategies**
  Stress can lead to difficulties sleeping. Minimise stress by:
  - fostering a strong social support network (colleagues, friends, and family)
  - building resources, including physical (diet/exercise/physical health), and informational (education)
  - reduce the symptoms of stress (relaxing, meditation or taking a bath)

Sleep quality checklist

Are you feeling un-focused or un-productive at work?

- If you are feeling a general lack of energy and this is interfering with your work, you may want to consider if you are getting enough quality sleep.

- Additional signs may be frequent yawning, falling asleep at work, memory problems, and reduced capacity for communication.

How long does it take you to fall asleep?

- It should take you about 30 minutes to fall asleep after getting into bed.

How many times do you wake up at night?

- Waking up 1 time in the night is considered good whereas anything above 2 may indicate poor sleep quality.

If you wake up during the night, how long do you stay awake?

- If you do wake up at night, this should only be for a short time, preferably less than 20 minutes.

- To help fall back asleep, make sure to keep your exposure to light to a minimum, do not look at the clock as this might cause stress, and use relaxation techniques like meditation and deep breathing.

Of the time you spend in bed at night, how much time are you actually asleep?

- It is best to be asleep for at least 85% of the time spent in bed. So, if you stay in bed for 8 hours, at least 7 hours should be spent sleeping.

How many naps do you take each day?

- Taking more than 1 nap a day may be a sign you are not getting enough sleep

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Useful resources

- Talk to your GP
- Sleep health foundation Australia - (02) 8814 8655 www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au
- Safe Work NSW - 13 10 50 contact@safework.nsw.gov.au
- ResSleep (for sleep apnoea) - 1300 925 387 www.ressleep.com.au/new-south-wales
- This way up (for learning and dealing with insomnia) – (02) 8382 1437. https://thiswayup.org.au/how-we-can-help/courses/managing-insomnia

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If you have any questions about icare Research, please email Research@icare.nsw.gov.au