



Healthy sleep habits

Many Australians are suffering from fatigue and exhaustion on a daily basis due to inadequate or ineffective sleep. Sleep is essential for good health, refreshing the mind, repairing the body, and restoring your physical and mental health.



Lack of sleep can cause fatigue, poor concentration and memory, mood disturbances, impaired judgement and reaction time, and poor physical coordination. Common causes of sleep deprivation include parenthood, shift work, travelling across time zones, illness, poor sleeping habits, some medications and the internet. Being tired to the point of fatigue or exhaustion means that we are less likely to perform well. Neurons do not fire optimally, muscles are not rested, and the body's organ systems are not synchronized. Lapses in focus from sleep deprivation can even result in accidents or injury.

Research suggests that sleep helps learning and memory in two distinct ways. First, a sleep-deprived person cannot focus attention optimally and therefore cannot learn efficiently. Second, sleep itself has a role in the consolidation of memory, which is essential for learning new information. Memory consolidation takes place during sleep through the strengthening of the neural connections that form our memories.

In general, teenagers require between 9-10 hours' sleep a night and adults between 7-9 hours. There is a very small percentage (3-6%) of the population who genetically require more or less sleep. Healthy sleep habits are essential for maintaining overall health, and can make a big difference to your mood, concentration, memory, and quality of life.

Did you know?

Sleep problems cost Australian businesses \$3 billion annually, and can cause 10,000 serious workplace injuries and 25,000 serious road crashes each year.

So how do you get a better night sleep?

Have a regular sleep pattern

Try to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning, even on weekends, holidays and days off. Being consistent reinforces your body's sleep-wake cycle and helps promote better sleep.

Make sure the bedroom is comfortable

Create a room that is ideal for sleeping. Often, this means cool, dark and quiet. Your mattress and pillow can contribute to better sleep, too. Since the features of good bedding are subjective, choose what feels most comfortable to you. If you have children or pets, try to set limits on how often they sleep with you.

Wind down and relax

Do the same thing each night to tell your body it's time to wind down and find a relaxation technique that works for you. This might include taking a warm bath or shower, reading a book, or listening to music. Relaxing activities can promote better sleep by easing the transition between wakefulness and drowsiness. Television, computers and other distractions can interfere with your sleep.

Pay attention to what you eat and drink

Try to not go to bed either hungry or too full. Your discomfort might keep you up. Also limit how much you drink before bed to prevent disruptive middle-of-the-night trips to the toilet. Whilst alcohol may help you get to sleep, it can disrupt your sleep. Caffeine (tea, coffee, and soft drinks) and the nicotine in cigarettes should also be avoided as they are stimulants that can keep you awake.

If you are struggling to sleep

Sleep is not something you can force. If you are not asleep within 20 minutes of going to bed you should get up, go to a darkened room and sit quietly. Do not have screen time (e.g. television, smartphone and computer), eat or drink. When you feel tired and sleepy again, go back to bed. This helps your mind link bed with sleep.

You may need professional help

If you have persistent problems with mood, restlessness in bed, severe snoring or waking up unrefreshed despite what should be an adequate length of sleep, make sure you see a doctor.

Are you eating too much sugar?

Statistics indicate Australians are eating too much sugar, with the average person consuming 60 grams of sugar per day, which is equivalent to 12 teaspoons. The highest intake is in 14-18 year old males, who usually consume around 160 grams or 38 teaspoons of sugar per day. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends we consume less than 25 grams or 6 teaspoons per day.

The way we eat has changed significantly over the last 100 years, with the rise in “fast” or “convenience” foods which are high in sugar and fat. Also, we are eating less whole foods and relying on pre-packaged foods which have hidden sugars. Sugar is disguised within terms on the ingredient list such as maltodextrin, glucose, fructose, maltose, sucrose and hydrolysed starch. Sugar is addictive and we develop an emotional and physical response when we eat it. Our cravings take over, especially when we are feeling sad or tired.

Here are some tips to reduce your sugar intake and reduce your risk of health complications such as obesity, diabetes and tooth decay.



Eat whole foods and fewer packaged foods



Cut back on sugary beverages, such as soft drinks, energy drinks and some fruit drinks



Avoid sugar loaded desserts, such as ice cream, cakes and biscuits



Avoid sauces with lots of sugar, such as tomato, BBQ and sweet chilli sauces



Eat healthy snacks like nuts and fruit. Most muesli and fruit bars have a high sugar content



Look at your breakfast. Lots of cereals, muffins and jams have large amounts of sugar. Opt for rolled oats or Weet-Bix instead.



Read food labels and aim for less than 10g of sugar per 100g



Take sugary items out of the pantry – remove the temptation of cravings



THE WHO RECOMMENDS LESS THAN 25 GRAMS OR 6 TEASPOONS PER DAY.

Healthy oatmeal cookies

These healthy oatmeal cookies are made with fibre-rich oats, coconut oil, and applesauce instead of butter and white sugar. They are paleo-friendly, easy to whip up and are naturally gluten and dairy-free.

Total time: 25 mins

Cook time: 10mins

Ingredients

- ▶ 2 ¼ cups rolled oats
- ▶ 1 cup oat flour
- ▶ ½ tsp baking soda
- ▶ ½ tsp baking powder
- ▶ ⅓ tsp ground cinnamon
- ▶ ⅓ tsp ground nutmeg
- ▶ ¼ tsp sea salt
- ▶ 6 tbsp coconut oil
- ▶ 2 tbsp applesauce
- ▶ 1 cup coconut sugar
- ▶ 2 egg whites (about ⅓ cup)
- ▶ 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ▶ ½ cup raisins or dark chocolate chips

Method

1. Preheat oven to 175°C.
2. Spray two baking trays with cooking spray.
3. In a medium bowl, mix together oats, flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. Set aside.
4. In a large mixing bowl, with the mixer set on medium speed, beat together oil, applesauce, sugar, egg whites and vanilla until fluffy and smooth. Slowly beat in the oat mixture. Lightly stir in raisins.
5. Using a tablespoon, place rounded spoonfuls of cookie dough about 2 inches apart on baking sheets. Press each cookie down with a fork a bit. Bake for 10 minutes, or until golden brown.
Note: the cookies will seem a little soft, but do not over bake or they'll get too crisp.
6. Remove from oven and let cool on sheet for about 5 minutes or until they start to harden up a bit. At this point you can transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.



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