

Healthy sleep habits

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.

The body's internal clock regulates when and how we sleep depending on the amount of light around us. When the sun sets, your brain releases hormones to make you sleepy. In the morning, exposure to daylight suppresses these hormones and releases brain chemicals to keep you awake.

In general, teenagers require between 9-10 hours sleep a night and mature adults between 7-9 hours. There is a very small percentage (3-6%) of the population that genetically require more or less sleep.

Common causes of sleep deprivation are parenthood, shiftwork, travel across time zones, illness, poor sleeping habits, some medications and the internet.

Did you know?

Between 20-30% of Australians experience problems with either falling asleep or staying asleep.

Top tips for a good nights sleep

1. Have a regular sleep pattern

Try to go to bed at the same time every evening 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 at night.



2. Make sure your 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 share your bed, make sure there is enough room for two. If you have children or pets, try to set limits on how often they sleep with you.

3. Wind down and relax before going to bed

Do the same thing each night to tell your body it is 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 soothing 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. It is better not to sleep with your TV on.

4. Pay attention to what you eat and drink

Do not go to bed either hungry or 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 during the night. Caffeine (tea, coffee and soft drinks) and the nicotine in cigarettes should be avoided as they are stimulants that can keep you awake.

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.

Key behaviours linked to weight loss success



The US-based National Weight Control Registry tracks people who have lost significant amounts of weight and kept it off. It is the biggest ongoing study of people who have lost weight and maintained it in the world, with the aim to identify predictors of successful weight loss maintenance.

The study identified the following common behaviours linked to long term weight maintenance, including:

- ▶ **Eating breakfast every day** – eating within one hour of waking can boost your metabolism for the rest of the day.
- ▶ **Eating a low fat and low calorie diet** – do not underestimate the amount of calories you consume at each meal. Fill up on low energy dense foods such as fruits, vegetables and lean protein.
- ▶ **Controlling the size of portions** – being ‘good’ on weekdays and splurging on weekends creates a harmful cycle.
- ▶ **Jumping on the scales at least once a week** – monitoring your weight regularly provides you with an accurate weight trend and early detection of weight regain, which allows you to adjust behaviours accordingly.
- ▶ **Watching less than 10 hours of television each week** – the most common excuse for not exercising is not having enough time. Swap some of your sitting time for moving.
- ▶ **Exercising, on average, one hour per day** – walk, ride, vacuum, take the stairs, you don’t have to run like a hamster on a wheel for 60 minutes. Take three 20-minute brisk walks, or compile the one hour based on a series of activities.
- ▶ **Not letting “small” slips turn into large weight regain** – when we learn new skills we make mistakes, the key is to learn from the mistake and prevent repeats.

Roast pumpkin, grilled vegetables & haloumi salad (Serves 4 - 5)

Ingredients:

- ▶ 1.5 to 2kgs of pumpkin peeled and seeded. Cut into thick wedges
- ▶ 1 tbsp of dried herbs (thyme, rosemary or sage)
- ▶ 4 tbsps of olive oil
- ▶ 2 large red onions peeled and cut into 1cms round
- ▶ 4 large portobello mushrooms, cut into thick slices
- ▶ 400 - 500g haloumi, cut into thick slices
- ▶ 4 soft boiled eggs (eggs boiled for 10mins from cold water)

Dressing:

- ▶ 2 tbsps of extra virgin olive oil
- ▶ 3 tbsps of balsamic vinegar
- ▶ Half a tbsp of honey or agave nectar
- ▶ Salt and pepper

Method:

1. Turn oven on to 220c. Use half the olive oil to coat the pumpkin, season with salt, pepper and your choice of dried herbs.
2. Roast the pumpkin in the oven for 20 - 30 mins until soft but not mushy.
3. Use the other half of the olive oil to coat the onion rounds, mushroom and the haloumi. Season with salt and pepper but no salt on haloumi as the cheese itself is quite salty.
4. Grill the onions and mushrooms either on a girdled pan or barbeque until soft and cooked through.
5. Make sure the pan is very hot before you grill the haloumi next. 30 seconds on each side otherwise it becomes squeaky if it is overcooked.
6. To make the dressing, mix all the ingredients together and season to taste.
7. Assemble the dish by placing the pumpkin on the bottom of your plate, top it with onions, mushrooms, haloumi and halved egg.

Drizzle the dressing over each plate. Serve and enjoy!

Replace the haloumi and the eggs with chickpeas (drained and warmed in a pan) for a vegan dish.



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