



**BEYOND
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PERSONAL TRAINING

**SLEEPING
YOUR WAY TO
GOOD HEALTH**

Do you find yourself eating and exercising the best you ever have, yet you still can't shed those kilos, tone up the way you want, or feel as healthy as you should? While you might think sleep has nothing to do with it, better sleep habits could be the key to improving your health and fitness beyond what you ever thought possible.

Here's our guide to improving your sleep and increasing your wellbeing.

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SO YOU DON'T GET 8 HOURS A NIGHT, WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Most of us are sure to have stories of sleep deprived nights or napping in snatches. Whether it be pulling all-nighters to get the latest project finished, or the constant late-night/early-morning system you've become accustomed to, poor sleep can affect more than just your energy levels.

Without regular, quality sleep, you risk:

- Being unable to lose weight and keep the kilos off
- Struggling to gain muscle and strength
- Disrupting natural hormone levels
- Speeding up the aging process
- Increasing your risk of chronic disease
- Lowering your immune system
- Having less energy and focus throughout your day

In contrast, good sleep habits are shown to improve your ability to lose weight and gain muscle, enhance mental and physical energy, and keep you healthier and happier overall.

HOW MUCH SLEEP DO YOU REALLY NEED

Sleep requirements vary from person to person, but the general consensus is that you should get between 7-9 hours per night. Of course, plenty of people get by on less, with most adults reporting getting 6 hours a night on a regular basis – but remember, there's a difference between 'getting by' and functioning at your best.

When planning how much sleep to get in a night, aim for at least 7 hours, with 8 being the 'golden number'. If you get into a regular routine of aiming for 7 hours or more, your body will usually start to tell you how much sleep you need by waking you up when its ready. This could be at the 7, 8, or 9 hour mark. If you're regularly getting this much sleep and still feeling exhausted, you should speak to your GP about any possible conditions that may be preventing you from feeling rested after a good night's sleep.

SLEEP HYGIENE – WHAT IS IT, AND HOW DO YOU IMPROVE IT?

Like most things in life, our bodies crave routine. This is the same with our sleep habits – whether it be our behaviours prior to getting into bed, our morning routine when we wake up, or going to bed at the same time every night. All of this can be considered part of your 'sleep hygiene', which can have a big impact both on the quality of your sleep, and your ability to fall and stay asleep.

So what are the best ways to improve your sleep hygiene?

1. Set a regular routine and stick to it

While going to bed at the same time every night and rising at the same time every morning might not be practical every day, you should try to stick to a routine as much as possible. If you keep a regular sleep schedule, your body will naturally fall into a sleep rhythm, winding down for the night at the correct time, and waking you in the morning feeling energised.

2. Limit your alcohol and caffeine intake

You've probably heard before that caffeine is a no-no for a good night's sleep. Most health professionals recommend limiting caffeine after 2pm – so if you need that afternoon coffee hit, try to get it in sooner rather than later in the afternoon. The same goes for alcohol. While a few drinks of an evening might make you feel drowsy, excess alcohol actually hinders a good night's sleep. Keep alcohol consumption under 2 drinks of an evening to enhance your sleep quality and ensure you're well rested.

3. Learn to shut off your mind

If you've spent hours staring at a ceiling unable to sleep, it's probably because your mind was too active. While this could be due to poor bedtime habits (more on this below) it can also be because you haven't cleared your mind for the day. Find an evening habit that works for you to both clear your head and relax your mind. This could be doing a brain dump or keeping a journal, writing a to-do list for the next day, reading a book, having a shower or bath, or engaging in mindfulness or meditative practices.

4. Go natural!

While modern technology has great benefits for productivity, communication and leisure time, electronics are a killer for sleep! The artificial light from TVs, computers and phones not only delay your body's circadian rhythm (internal body clock), they also stop your body from producing melatonin, the hormone that helps you fall asleep. If you can, turn off ALL electronics 30 minutes prior to bedtime. If you must use a phone or computer, try going into 'dark mode' to limit the white screens you're looking at, and dim the screen's light as much as you can.

5. Optimise your sleep environment

As well as controlling how much artificial light you're taking in prior to bed, pay attention to how dark your room is when going to sleep. It's a good idea to use a smaller lamp in your room at night, rather than going straight from a large amount of light to darkness. You should also cover your windows and close the door to make the room as dark as possible. Aside from a dark room, having a neat bedroom set at a neutral-cool temperature has been shown to be a more relaxing environment, and therefore more conducive to sleep.

RISE AND SHINE

Once you've had a good night's sleep, how you wake up and start your day is also important. Think of your sleep routine as a 24 hour cycle – what you do when you wake up is just as important as what you do when you go to sleep.

One important factor in your morning routine is how you wake up. Alarm clocks can be practical, but can also start you off on the wrong foot if they jar you from a deep sleep. Paying attention to your body's natural rhythms is the best way to start your day right.

This includes:

- waking to sunlight - either naturally or by using a dawn-simulating alarm clock
- waking during lighter sleep - a sleep tracker can be a good idea here
- waking slowly - an alarm with a gradual build in noise is a better idea than a blaring siren first thing in the morning

Once you've woken up, start moving straight away. Laying around in bed hitting 'snooze' for the next hour is a sure-fire way to leave you feeling groggy and inattentive. Instead, get out of bed as soon as you can, open your curtains, and start your day. You'll find a routine that works best for you, but we recommend getting your morning work-out in, having a refreshing shower, and then indulging in a healthy breakfast – you're sure to feel much more energised doing this than you ever will with that extra 15 minutes snooze time!

If you're feeling sluggish, unhealthy, or just not quite right, improving your sleep could be the way to go.

Try out our tips for next few weeks and then drop us a line to tell us how your sleep habits have improved.

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