



## Looking after your mental health

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP



Sleep is important for your mental health. Most people need between 5 to 9 hours sleep a night. The ideal amount is 8 hours, but everyone's different.

Sometimes it's not always possible to get as much sleep as you would like. If you don't sleep well, you won't feel as alert as you should. You will feel easily agitated and your actions may seem slow.

Stress and anxiety can lead to sleeping problems. You can experience stress or anxiety at work, with family, or in daily life. As the stressful situation passes, a more regular sleep pattern should return.

Try not to worry if your sleep is disturbed for a short while. This can be perfectly normal.

### Disrupted sleep

Difficulty sleeping is often called insomnia. The odd night without sleep won't cause you any damage. But insomnia can leave you tired and moody. You might also be unable to focus on tasks.

Things that can disrupt sleep include:

- asthma
- breathing problems
- stimulants like caffeine and nicotine
- some types of medication
- pain and cold relievers
- stress and worry





## Better sleeping tips

You can take steps to improve your sleep. They include:

- keeping active
- avoiding stimulants
- keeping to a routine
- avoiding naps
- relaxing your body and mind



### Keep active

Regular exercise can help improve your sleep. But try to avoid exercise in the hour before bedtime.

### Avoid stimulants

Avoid tea and coffee, or foods high in sugar, in the evenings.

### Routine

Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. This helps your body clock get into a rhythm and makes sleeping feel more natural.

### Naps

If possible, avoid naps during the day. This is because it makes it harder to fall asleep at night.

### Relax

Process the day's thoughts and feelings and then let go of them. If it helps, write things down or talk about them with someone you trust. Reading in bed can focus your mind and empty it of the day's worries.



Your bedroom should be a comfortable temperature. If it's too hot or too cold, it may make it more difficult for you to sleep.

Turn off all technology and do something restful such as gentle stretches or taking a warm bath.

Deep breathing exercises can help you to relax. The smell of lavender oil also helps. Try sprinkling a few drops on your pillow. You can learn about other [relaxation exercises](#) here.

Learning meditation is a very useful tool for stilling the mind and relaxing the body.

## Relaxation tips

Fit things into your day that help you unwind. It's different for everyone - for you, it could be:

- listening to music
- going for a walk
- tea with friends
- yoga
- running
- reading
- watching television

Find something that you enjoy and make a conscious effort to do that relaxing thing every day. Even 10 minutes of downtime can help you manage stress better. The more pauses you can build into your day the calmer you'll feel.

It can help to have a specific place where you go to relax. This can be your bedroom, bathroom, the garden





shed or a small corner in the kitchen. It should be somewhere you feel comfortable and secure.

[www.padraigomorain.com](http://www.padraigomorain.com) - mindfulness

# 10 WAYS TO GET A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP

You likely know that eating right and staying active are important parts of your weight loss journey, but did you know that sleep is also a vital component? Studies have found that people who do not get enough sleep are more likely to gain weight.<sup>1</sup> Why? Lack of sleep can affect parts of the brain that regulate appetite and energy levels – which may lead to poor food choices or overeating.

**HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU SLEEP SOUNDLY:**

- CUT OUT CAFFEINE BEFORE BED**  
You might love getting your caffeine fix in the morning or during the afternoon slump, but avoiding it later in the day may help you rest more soundly.
- RELY ON A ROUTINE**  
Developing a relaxing ritual such as reading or yoga before bed could help you transition to sleep a little easier.
- CREATE A SLEEP SANCTUARY**  
If you're looking to get more z's, make sure that your bedroom is quiet, dark and cool for an ideal sleep environment.
- SET A SLEEP SCHEDULE**  
When you go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, your body's internal clock becomes accustomed to your routine.
- AVOID WATCHING THE CLOCK**  
This may create stress, so resist the temptation by turning the clock away from you.
- AVOID NIGHTTIME WORKOUTS**  
Although exercise is important for good sleep, vigorous activity right before bed may make it more difficult to nod off.<sup>2</sup>
- EAT WITH YOUR CIRCADIAN RHYTHM**  
Not only can late-night snacking and heavy meals lead to weight gain, but indigestion may occur, making it more difficult to fall asleep.
- DON'T GET FRUSTRATED**  
If counting sheep doesn't work, try reading a book or listening to music until you feel sleepy.
- BALANCE HYDRATION**  
You don't want to wake up thirsty in the middle of the night, but you probably don't want to wake up for a bathroom trip either.
- NAP EARLY AND KEEP IT SHORT**  
Although sometimes there's nothing better than an afternoon nap, it may interfere with nighttime sleep.

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1. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/molecular-ties-between-lack-sleep-weight-gain>  
2. <https://sleep.org/articles/exercise-time-of-day/>  
<http://community.jennycraig.com/perfect-portion-blog/live-life/these-sleep-hygiene-tips-can-help-you-rest-better/>



## De La Salle College Guidance & Counselling Department

