

# Awaken your best.

The Three Pillars of Health  
Sleep + Exercise + Nutrition



# INTRODUCTION

The “Pillars of Health” refer to three elements that are needed to maintain a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle. These pillars are:

## SLEEP + EXERCISE + NUTRITION

Your focus on each of these pillars needs to be balanced. So, in order to maintain a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle it's important to give the same level of attention and care to getting quality sleep, exercise and nutrition.

The saying “you're only as strong as your weakest link” goes a long way to understanding what happens when you don't give equal consideration to each pillar of health. In this [e-book] our focus is primarily on the first pillar: sleep.

Having a good night's sleep is important for brain function, muscle repair and metabolism. So, even if you exercise daily and maintain a balanced diet, if your sleep is poor you won't see the desired results of your efforts.

## Focusing on Sleep

A one-off sleepless night every now and then can happen as a result of drinking alcohol or skipping a meal. However, consistent sleeplessness, trouble falling asleep and restlessness during the night may be an indicator that something else may be the cause.

4% of adult males and 2% of adult females suffer from some sort of sleep disorder<sup>1</sup> (i.e. obstructive sleep apnea)

Using this eBook to focus on sleep should help you to unlock the Sleeping Pillar and move towards a more comfortable night's rest.

## Sleeping is the Key

One of the most important systems in your body is your immune system. While you sleep, your body is working to repair and restore you, which is when the immune system does most of its best work. If you aren't sleeping well enough, you aren't allowing your immune system the time to do its job.

Without a properly functioning immune system, your body is susceptible to the threat of infection and disease.

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# QUALITY VS QUANTITY OF SLEEP

When it comes to sleep, it's always important to make sure that you are getting an adequate amount of quality sleep.

Even if you have great quality sleep, if it only lasts for 3-4 hours, it's not likely going to be long enough in duration for your body to properly repair and restore. On the other end of the spectrum, you may have 10 hours of sleep that is very poor quality and still feel unrefreshed. So, realistically, your body and brain should be getting quality sleep for an adequate amount of time.

## Why is this?

Your body goes through natural sleep cycles that require time in order for you to feel refreshed for the next day. During these stages of sleep your immune system works to protect the body from cold and infections, so when your sleep is compromised, so is your immune system.

## The Stages of Sleep according to Dr Carmel Harrington<sup>2</sup>

### STAGE 1:

This marks the onset of sleep. In this stage, you will be easily distracted from sleep and depending on your tiredness, this stage lasts for up to 7 minutes.

### STAGE 2:

You are less likely to be aroused from sleep in this stage, which can last up to 25 minutes - also depending on tiredness.

### STAGE 3:

This is also known as deep sleep or slow wave sleep, as you produce slow brain waves. If you are awakened from this stage, you may be highly disorientated. This stage tends to last 20-40 minutes during the first sleep cycle of the night before moving into REM sleep.

### STAGE 4:

Occurs when Rapid Eye Movements (REM) take place and brain-wave pattern is similar to that of your awake brain. At this time, you will be dreaming and a healthy person's REM stage may only last for 5-10 minutes at a time.

When it comes to getting more qualitative and quantitative sleep, it's important to understand the basic do's and don'ts for sleep and what threats lay in the path of a good night's rest and how you can reduce these.

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# THREATS TO YOUR SLEEP

According to the Mayo Clinic<sup>3</sup> the average adult requires from 7 to 9 hours of sleep every day in order to function at our peak.

Threats to a good night's sleep can be any range of issues that you can or can't change, including environmental, cultural, emotional, physical and psychological sleep barriers.

## Environmental:

- Too hot/cold in bedroom
- Too bright/too dark in bedroom
- Light emitting from electronic screens or devices e.g. mobile, tablet, laptop
- External noise (e.g. traffic, neighbours etc.)

The simplest task is to look at your sleeping environment for sleep barriers and attempt to minimise their effect on you.

## Cultural:

- Unpredictable or long work hours (e.g. shift work)
- Family expectations (new baby etc.)

Most likely you will be unable to change these, however being aware of your cultural environment is important in recognising sleep barriers.

## Emotional:

- Stress
- Fear of missing out

If you believe that sleep is in the way of you achieving certain goals and tasks, you may want to speak with your doctor to understand why.

## Physical:

- Pain
- 

If you feel pain or discomfort during rest, you may want to re-address exercise or speak with a doctor to see how this can be minimised.

## Psychological:

Understanding of how much sleep you actually need<sup>4</sup>

- Newborns (0-3 months): Sleep range narrowed to 14-17 hours each day (previously it was 12-18)
- Infants (4-11 months): Sleep range widened two hours to 12-15 hours (previously it was 14-15)
- Toddlers (1-2 years): Sleep range widened by one hour to 11-14 hours (previously it was 12-14)
- Preschoolers (3-5): Sleep range widened by one hour to 10-13 hours (previously it was 11-13)
- School age children (6-13): Sleep range widened by one hour to 9-11 hours (previously it was 10-11)  
Teenagers (14-17): Sleep range widened by one hour to 8-10 hours (previously it was 8.5-9.5)
- Younger adults (18-25): Sleep range is 7-9 hours (new age category)
- Adults (26-64): Sleep range did not change and remains 7-9 hours
- Older adults (65+): Sleep range is 7-8 hours (new age category)

# SLEEP DO'S AND DON'TS

In order to improve the quality of your sleep, here are a few dos and don'ts<sup>5</sup>.

## DO'S

- ✓ **Set a routine for going to sleep and waking up.**  
This will help to set up a natural rhythm for your body.
- ✓ **Understand how much sleep you need.**  
The majority of people can live with 7 to 9 hours of sleep every day for normal memory and brain function<sup>5</sup>.
- ✓ **Get your daily Vitamin D intake.**  
Vitamin D works to promote melatonin (the sleep hormone)
- ✓ **Have a comfortable sleeping environment.**  
See the above threats and work out if your sleep environment could be improved.
- ✓ **Maintain your bed's sanctity.**  
Your bed needs to be associated in your mind as the place you go for sleep- not to watch TV or work.
- ✓ **Have a bedtime routine.**  
Make sure you give your body time to relax each night leading up to sleep.

5. Eric J. Olson, M.D. How Many Hours of Sleep are enough for Good Health? Mayo Clinic; 2016. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/expert-answers/how-many-hours-of-sleep-are-enough/faq-20057898>

## DON'TS

- ✗ **Drink caffeinated drinks leading to up to sleep.**  
Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea, chocolate and soft drinks. Opt for herbal teas or hot water.
- ✗ **Drink Alcohol before bed.**  
Alcohol may worsen snoring or sleep apnea, which causes restlessness throughout the night.
- ✗ **Exercise before bed.**  
Exercise acts to stimulate your body and therefore will prevent you from falling asleep. Exercise should take place at least 2 hours prior to bed.
- ✗ **Eat heavy, spicy or sugary meals or going to bed hungry.**  
Avoid heavy meals that may promote a restless night and eat a light snack to avoid going to bed hungry.
- ✗ **Smoke.**  
Another stimulant, nicotine will make it hard for you to fall asleep.
- ✗ **Take naps.**  
Daytime naps may devalue the sleep you hope to get later on in the evening.
- ✗ **Engage in stimulating activities.**  
Watching exciting movies, playing competitive games and even having important conversations can stimulate your mind, keeping you from falling asleep.

Most people don't prioritise sleep and therefore aren't giving their bodies enough time to rest and recover. By reading the next section "Are you an Owl or a Lark", you will be able to determine what time you should be going to sleep to accommodate for your natural disposition.

In the next section "Are you an Owl or a Lark", you will be able to categorise whether you should be sleeping earlier or later than you are already.

# ARE YOU AN OWL OR A LARK?

Understanding whether you're an 'Owl' or a 'Lark' can help you to manage how you sleep and live.

Tracking your sleep is the first step to finding out what time your body naturally prefers; early nights or early mornings. Once you have worked out if you prefer all-nighters or early mornings, you can start to accommodate this by changing when you go to sleep and when you wake up.

## Larks:

- Get tired earlier in the evening
- Most productive in the morning
- Tend to go to sleep and rise earlier than Owls

## Owls:

- Struggle to get out of bed
- Do their best work in the evening
- Tend to go to sleep and rise later than Larks

## The Takeaway:

So, Larks (who prefer to be up early) should go to bed earlier in the evening to accommodate for their early starts. Owls on the other hand, prefer the late evening and should therefore allow themselves enough sleep in the morning to make up for their late nights.

In saying this, it's important to understand that even though you may identify with an Owl or a Lark, the amount of sleep you are actually able to obtain on any given day will be impacted by the threats or barriers – as listed in the previous chapter – that exist in your sleep environment. If you are not able to achieve enough sleep during the night, you may need to have a catch-up nap the following day, so long as it doesn't interfere with your following night's sleep.

New research is coming out all the time claiming that daytime naps can help improve memory<sup>6</sup>, increase alertness<sup>7</sup>, and reverse the hormonal effects of a poor night's sleep<sup>8</sup>.

Once you have identified whether you are more like an Owl or a Lark you can change the time when you go to sleep and wake up to be more like an Owl or a Lark (as appropriate) and see if this helps alleviate any sleeping issues. If you still have problems sleeping or don't feel refreshed after a night's sleep, this may be because you've simply had a bad night's sleep or it may indicate you have a sleeping problem.

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# BAD NIGHT OR SLEEPING PROBLEM?

So, how do you find out if you have a sleeping problem or if you've simply had a poor night's sleep?

It's important to know what indicators exist for someone who's had a poor night's sleep.

## Key indicators of a bad night's sleep:

- Restlessness in bed
- Waking tired/waking unrefreshed
- Repeated wakefulness
- Inability to maintain concentration
- Tiredness/lethargy
- Irritability

The answer for the question "is it just a bad night's sleep or a sleeping problem?" can be determined by reviewing your sleep; keeping a sleep diary or getting a sleep tracker. Sleep trackers make it easy to see how much movement you've had throughout the night, what time you fell asleep and what time you awoke. Manually tracking your sleep can be tougher, because you might not always remember restlessness or falling asleep, however it's an immediate solution that costs nothing more than that of a pen and a piece of paper.

If you review your sleep over a week or a month and you consistently see the key indicators of a bad night's sleep coming up night after night, you may have a sleeping problem that you should talk with your doctor about.

## Consistent Sleepless Nights:

Having consistent sleepless nights or consistently poor sleep can wreak havoc on your life; making it harder (and more dangerous) to complete simple tasks like driving, working and enjoying family time.

Recognising that your sleeplessness or poor sleep doesn't exist because of one-off factors like too much caffeine in your system or inadequate exercise allows you to take control of the situation.

It's important that women prioritize sleep and treat it as a necessity rather than a luxury. It is essential for good health.

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## LASTLY...

Taking all three pillars into consideration is the key to optimum health during the course of your life.

In terms of the sleep pillar, maintaining a healthy diet with great nutritional value is one step in the right direction to achieving better sleep quality. Participating in 45 minutes of aerobic exercise daily may also help you achieve consistently better quality sleep.

If you are still not able to achieve consistently good quality sleep after making appropriate changes to strengthen your pillars of health – sleep, exercise and nutrition – speak to us about undergoing a home sleep test to determine whether there are other factors at play that may be preventing you from getting a good night's rest.

[ABOUT THE HOME SLEEP TEST >](#)

[CONTACT US >](#)

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