

Getting better sleep – ways to improve your sleep that you can start today!

- 1. Manage your stress.** Learn to relax. Effective stress management strategies include imagery, deep breathing, progressive muscular relaxation, and relaxation exercises. These exercises will not take away your worries, but they should help to relax you sufficiently so that you are able to fall asleep, be more refreshed in the morning and be better equipped to cope with your concerns.
- 2. Darkness.** Sleeping in near or total darkness if possible is recognised as most conducive to good sleep patterns.
- 3. Set the mood.** Ensure the sleeping environment is comfortable and relaxing. A good quality mattress and pillow with comfortable bedding will go a long way towards helping you get a good night's sleep. Keep the room temperature around 18 degrees Celsius wherever possible.
- 4. Develop a bedtime routine.** Create rituals that help you to wind down from the day's activities and prepare yourself physically and mentally for sleep. Your brain needs at least 30 minutes to wind down enough to begin to be receptive to the idea of sleep. Turn off the TV and stop doing anything (e.g., dishes, folding the washing, paperwork) that stimulates your brain about 30 to 60 minutes before you anticipate going to bed. Reading before bed is fine if you find it relaxing rather than stimulating.
- 5. Establish a sleep schedule.** Make sleep a priority and establish a daily schedule that allows sufficient time for you to get adequate sleep. Work out how much sleep you need (for most people this is between 6–8 hours per night of good quality sleep) and ensure you go to bed at the same time every night and wake at the same time every morning. When this is not possible, focus more on maintaining the morning wake time while keeping the evening curfew as often as possible. Set the alarm and get up at the same time each day, regardless of how much sleep you had the night before.
- 6. If you can't get to sleep.** Sometimes you may find that you are not able to fall asleep easily. Don't continue to lie there trying hard to get to sleep. If after 15 minutes you still feel fully awake, get up and do something boring (but do not watch TV as this may have the counter effect of stimulating your brain further). When you feel sleepy, go back to bed. Repeat this process as often as necessary throughout the night.

Resources for commanders:

Below is a resource developed specifically for the military context providing information and guidelines to commanders for the practical management of fatigue and tiredness in troops. Further information is available from the local mental health team or medical practitioners. Go to <http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dsg/sites/dmh/> to access the Fatigue Management Handbook.

Further information

Additional sources of information on effective stress management can be obtained from your local Medical Centre, Chaplain, Social Worker, Psychologist, or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day. Talk to these people and be open and frank about how you feel.

Mental Health Resources

Local Medical Centres Your local medical officer can provide immediate assistance and referrals as required.

Psychology Support Section All Psychology Support Sections offer after-hours, critical incident support through the local Duty Officer/Officer of the Day.

Defence Community Organisation

<http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dco/> or www.defence.gov.au/dco/

The DCO provides services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week all year round including public holidays. During normal business hours the first point of call is the Duty Social Worker or Military Support Officer. Outside these core hours and on Public Holidays, calls should be directed to the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) on 1800 801 026 or if calling from overseas +61 2 93594842.

Chaplains There are Chaplains connected to all units in Australia who can provide support and appropriate referrals.

The Family Information Network for Defence (FIND) (1800 020 031)

FIND is a phone service that provides easy access to personnel information on matters of everyday interest and concern. It is a confidential service that is available to every Service person and family anywhere in Australia.

Lifeline (131 114) If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call Lifeline for the cost of a local call.

Veterans and Veteran's Families Counselling Service (VPCS) This service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families. VETLINE – 24 hour emergency line (1800 011 046).

ADF Mental Health Strategy All-hours Support Line (ASL) The ASL is a confidential telephone triage support service for ADF members and their families that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. (1800 628 036) (FREECALL within Australia) and (61 2 9425 3878) (outside Australia)

Australian Defence Force Mental Health Strategy (ADFMHS)

Defweb Address <http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dsg/sites/dmh/>
Internet Address www.defence.gov.au/health/DMH/i-dmh.htm
Email DMH.mentalhealth@defence.gov.au



Australian Government
Department of Defence

ADF Mental Health Strategy

SLEEPING SOUNDLY

be well

work well

live well

FACT SHEET

Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

Good sleep can be hard to come by. A combination of lifestyle choices and work schedules may be partly responsible for the average nightly sleep falling from approximately 9 hours in 1910 to 7 hours in 2002. Whatever the cause, it is well known that sleep deprivation has a cumulative effect: in addition to having a negative affect on quality of life, it is also associated with a range of physical and mental health problems with potentially severe consequences for the individual.

What is good sleep?

You know you are having good quality sleep when you wake feeling refreshed, alert and energised. A person with a sleep disorder usually reports sleeping poorly or not enough. While sleep needs vary between individuals, most people need about 6 to 8 hours of good quality sleep per day. Individuals cycle through various stages of sleep throughout the night with a complete cycle taking approximately 90 minutes. Waking part way through a cycle either during the night or in the morning can leave you feeling groggy and lethargic.

Why is sleep important?

Sleep is necessary to sustain good health and well-being. It provides the mind and body with the opportunity to restore balances and repair itself. The immune system works to manufacture the necessary cells to fight off infection and disease, the pituitary gland produces growth hormones that help to repair tissues, and the overall chemical balance in the body is restored. At the same time the mind is working to organise and store memories from the day's activities. Sleep-deprived people often feel lethargic, have trouble concentrating, and are more at risk of accidents.

How do sleep problems affect you?

Sleep deprivation over time is associated with:

- aging more rapidly
- more susceptibility to illness
- increased risk of accidents
- more emotional problems such as depression and anxiety
- mood swings and irritability
- concentration problems, impaired judgement, difficulty making decisions
- reduced ability to deal with stress
- increased risk of general health concerns such as heart disease, diabetes, increased blood pressure
- apathy, low energy, fatigue
- headache
- general feeling of malaise or sickness
- weight gain.

Impact for the military

Sustained military operations often demand high level cognitive functioning, wakefulness, and vigilance over a prolonged period of time. In times of emergency or acute operations, individuals may get no sleep at all (total sleep deprivation). At other times, members may suffer partial sleep deprivation, where their sleep cycle is interrupted one or more times. Further, military members routinely work rotating shifts and serial night shifts, exposing them further to the potential effects of sleep deprivation.

Mistakes caused by fatigue can occur as early as the second night of lost sleep. Studies of military personnel report one night of sleep deprivation can decrease cognitive performance by 30 to 40%, while two nights of deprivation can result in 60 to 70% declines in performance. The ability to complete complex tasks is affected first. Unfortunately, those who need to make complex tactical decisions are also those people who are the least likely to get adequate sleep in combat situations.

Common treatments for sleep disorders

Treatments for sleep disorders vary depending on the specific condition identified. The form of therapy chosen also needs to take into account all of the factors that may be influencing the quality and quantity of your sleep on a daily basis. Treatment options include behavioural treatments (such as stress management and relaxation strategies), medication or a combination of these approaches. It is important that you discuss your concerns regarding your sleep patterns with your treating Medical Officer or a psychologist in order to confirm whether you have a sleep disorder and, if so, the type of treatment approach best suited to addressing the problem.

Do you have a sleep problem?

If sleep problems persist for a month or more you may need to consider whether you have a sleep disorder. Things like waking in the middle of the night, waking too early in the morning, not being able to get back to sleep, and waking feeling unrefreshed, can be indicators of a sleep disorder. In fact, even if the problem is temporary you should evaluate those factors that may be affecting you. Poor quality sleep is a concern no matter its cause or duration.

11 common causes of sleep problems

1. **Eating before sleeping.** Eating a large meal close to bed time stimulates the digestive system when it should be 'shutting down' for the day. As a rule of thumb try to leave at least 2 hours between your evening meal and going to bed.
2. **Emotional upset** (including depression, anxiety and stress).
3. **Bedroom environment not conducive to good sleep patterns** (too hot, too cold, too noisy).
4. **Exercising too close to bed time** (exercise stimulates your system by boosting your metabolism and the effect can linger for hours afterwards).
5. **Snoring** (if concerned about this see your Medical Officer).
6. **Medications** including diet pills, some blood pressure, allergy or asthma medications.
7. **Chronic pain.**
8. **Stimulants** including caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drink, diet pills, chocolate, some over-the-counter medications) and nicotine. To reduce the chance that caffeine and nicotine affects your sleep, try to have your last source of caffeine and/or cigarette of the day progressively further from bedtime until your last is 4 to 6 hours before your anticipated bedtime.
9. **Poor sleep/bedroom habits.** Only use your bed for sleep and sex. Do not use your bedroom as an office or watch TV in bed.
10. **Alcohol.** While it may help you to get to sleep initially, it will disrupt your sleep cycles resulting in poor quality sleep.
11. **A baby.** A new baby typically results in over 400 hours of lost sleep for parents in the first year.