

General Sleep Management Principles



For big occasions and games, and for general health

Sleep Fundamentals

- Quality of sleep is a good marker of our overall general health so if you have not been sleeping well for some time (eg. many weeks), it is recommended that you speak to your doctor or a trusted health professional, including a psychologist.
- Sleep disruption is normal from time to time, and so it is not unusual for many people to have disrupted sleep at least once a week, or so. However, such disruptions usually have a simple explanation, where our usual sleep routine may have been disrupted due to, for example, a late night, travel across time-zones, sleeping in a strange bed, illness, worry, digesting strange food, or nervousness or excitement associated with an up-coming event.
- It is important that we strive for regular and consistent sleep routines. This includes going to bed and arising at roughly the same time each day if possible. Furthermore, as 'diurnal' (asleep when the sun is down) beings, we are advised to be asleep well before midnight (preferably 9:30pm to 11pm) each evening and out of bed soon after the sun rises.
- Most teenagers need at least 8 hours of sleep a night, and 9-10 hours of sleep each day is not unusual, especially if that young person is under-going a growth spurt, or is actively involved in sport and training hard.

The Helpful Things

- ✓ Prepare for sleep each day by routinely including some 'wind-down' activities into your evening routine, in the last hour or so before sleep-time. These activities assist you to calm both your body and your mind. These activities might include listening to quiet or comforting music, meditation, watching something funny on TV, a warm bath or shower, a massage or reading a book.
- ✓ Related to the above, put a 'gap' between your busy day (whether school, work or sport / training / gym, etc) and time for sleep. Fill this gap with relaxing or pleasant activities as noted above.
- ✓ Plan ahead so sleep time can be 'scheduled' as an important goal to meet every day.
- ✓ Aim to achieve 'closure' each day, and so do not leave worries, confusion, fears, etc 'hanging' else you will not be able to properly wind down. One of the simplest ways to do this is to use a note-book to complete a 'to-do-list' including possible solutions for any worries you may have. As need be, prioritise this list and add dates or times to action if you can.
- ✓ Another closure process is to 'debrief' with a family member or partner and so get things of concern 'off-your-chest' rather than trying to 'sleep on them'. Debriefing might include just 'letting off steam' but might also include solving some worries, where the action to solve can almost always be left to tomorrow. If it can be solved that evening, then act then, and so be relieved come sleep-time.
- ✓ Learn to meditate, to slow down your busy mind and to become good at shifting your attention to neutral or pleasant images, feelings or sounds.
- ✓ Become better at 'accepting the things you cannot change' (especially that evening) and leave the changing of things to the next day, or beyond.
- ✓ If you cannot get to sleep, or get back to sleep, then you are better off getting up and doing something (not too complex or energetic), and generally, within 30 minutes or so, you may feel tired enough to return to bed.

- ✓ If you do get up because the 'mind is spinning', then consider opening your note book and writing things down. Write down the problems or the worries. Then ask yourself, so what can I do about each of these, now or tomorrow? If something can be done then, like doing some meditation or drinking a glass of water, do so. Or if nothing can be done at that time, acknowledge that, and if an action is helpful for tomorrow, write that down. Then hopefully you can reassure yourself, there is nothing more I can do tonight, so time to chill!
- ✓ If a big or important event is looming, believe in what you have done to prepare, you have done your best, and if the game or event is tomorrow, then tomorrow you can succeed, not tonight. Accept and be forgiving of yourself, so sleep! Or if you have not done your best, then do so next time, then you will not need to have any regrets. So learn from such experiences.
- ✓ Understand that many people have succeeded the day after getting minimal sleep. It is not as bad as it may seem!

Things to Avoid Approaching Sleep Time

- × Large meals, vigorous exercise or solving complex problems.
- × Arguments or activities that may generate negative emotions and so raise arousal levels in the body.
- × Alcohol, caffeine and non-usual foods.
- × Starting something complex or time-consuming that delays sleep beyond the time planned.
- × Avoid sleeping tablets or excessive use of alcohol to cause sleep. Both prevent quality sleep (affects REM sleep required for psychological health and memory consolidation) occurring and can lead to other unhelpful health outcomes.
- × Perfectionism. Nothing is perfect, including your preparation for a big event or performance.

Anxiety, Arousal and Sleep Problems

Anxiety (worry, nervousness, fear, uncertainty, ruminating, etc) and elevated levels of arousal (physiological responses and activity in the body) are common causes of sleep problems among relatively healthy people.

If anxiety or arousal management are substantial problems for you and are affecting your sleep, speak to your doctor or an appropriate health professional including a psychologist.

These are also mental skills and therapies available to assist so speak to a psychologist or your doctor.

These notes prepared by Peter Trask, performance psychologist, Mooloolaba QLD. Please feel free to contact me anytime if you require further information about this or related topics.

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