

Unlocking the power of sleep to improve wellbeing



We all know how good it feels to get a good night's sleep. That's because getting sleep is much more than just rest. It's an essential biological process that allows our bodies and brains to rest, repair, and recharge, directly impacting our moods, cognitive functions and overall health.

Recent studies are allowing us to better understand the powerful effect sleep has on both our mental and physical wellbeing, which directly influences our daily productivity, emotional resilience, and long-term health.

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The science behind sleep

According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleep serves as the body's natural repair system, allowing crucial processes that don't occur at any other time during the day. During sleep, our brains consolidate our memories from the day, clear metabolic waste, and strengthen neural pathways essential for learning and decision-making. The Australian Government's Sleep Health Foundation backs this up, saying these processes are so important, that even a slight lack of sleep can significantly impair our ability to think and make decisions the next day.

Our physical abilities are affected just as much. Good sleep gives our body the chance to strengthen our immune function, regulate the hormones responsible for hunger and stress, and repair our cells throughout our bodies. So, it's no surprise that people who get good quality sleep show better physical health, have lower rates of cardiovascular disease, and are better at managing their weight.

Sleep and our mental health.

We all know how grumpy and tired we can be if we're not getting enough sleep. Sleep's impact on mental health cannot be overemphasized. It has a huge influence on our ability to regulate our emotions, be resilient in times of stress, and effects our general psychological wellbeing. During deep sleep, our brains process our emotional experiences by consolidating good memories and diminishing the intensity of negative emotional associations. Proving that when something has upset you or given you stress, it's always good to sleep on it

The benefits go far beyond mood regulation. Quality sleep enhances our attention span, improves problem-solving abilities, and boosts creative thinking. This happens because sleep allows our brain to form new neural connections and strengthen existing pathways, essentially upgrading our mental processing power each night.

Better sleep improves emotional intelligence, communication effectiveness, and collaborative abilities - all essential features of leadership and team dynamics.



Workplace Performance

With such strong benefits for our physical and mental wellbeing, sleep profoundly affects our ability to perform our best at work. In fact, research shows that well-rested employees perform better at more complex tasks and make fewer errors than those who are sleep-deprived.

As well as the quality of our work performance, there are also practical impacts of poor sleep. In Australia, a study showed that just over a quarter of workplace injuries were due to inadequate sleep. Industries that rely on shift work are at the highest risk.

Sleep also helps your relationships with team members and how well you can work together. These interpersonal skills are so important for performing better in the workplace. Better sleep improves emotional intelligence, communication effectiveness, and collaborative abilities - all essential features of leadership and team dynamics. The Australian Psychological Society notes that sleep-rested people show greater empathy and more positive social interactions, creating stronger professional relationships.

Unlocking the power of sleep in your workplace.

The simple story is that when we get the right amount of quality sleep, we are healthier, happier and safer. Getting a good night's sleep (every night) is so important for all parts of our lives, including work.

Now, more than ever, we realise that poor sleep can be detrimental to our minds and bodies. So if a workplace wants to help their team work to their full potential and productivity, they need to unlock the power of sleep. And this means helping them develop good sleep habits to get longer, higher-quality sleep, ultimately boosting their wellbeing and productivity.

'Sleep hygiene' is what we call the strategies and habits we can all develop to get better sleep and manage our fatigue. Workplace education about sleep hygiene and fatigue is perhaps the easiest and most common way to help people improve sleep and overcome any issues.

The more we learn about the importance of good sleep, the more we understand how to develop better habits to get the sleep we need. It starts with setting a regular bedtime and creating a routine that helps us fall asleep.

How to get good a good night's sleep.

Good sleep is something that we can improve with practice. Developing a bedtime routine is essential. Here are some simple tips you can give your team members.

1. Set a bedtime and wake-up time you can stick to every day of the week. This helps sync your body's natural circadian rhythms.
2. Stop eating three hours before bed. Eating raises our body temperature, which hinders sleep.
3. Try dropping your evening cup of coffee or tea to avoid caffeine.
4. Limit your alcohol, as this can result in poor sleep quality.
5. Keep the lights low in the evening – low light stimulates your body's melatonin production, the hormone that prepares your brain for sleep.
6. Have a warm, relaxing ten-minute bath with some drops of lavender oil. Then, give your body time to cool down after.
7. Write a list of the things you need to do the next day. This helps to stop you from waking up in the middle of the night worrying about the day ahead.
8. Turn off the TV, and don't take your screens to bed. Screens and scrolling keep us up later and stimulate the brain.
9. Listening to slow, relaxing music can help you get to sleep faster and sleep longer.
10. Get your bedroom sleep-friendly with thick curtains, keep the temperature down as you sleep better in a cool bedroom, remove the screens, and get the most comfortable bed and bedding you can.

Workplace strategies

Getting into good sleep habits happens mostly at home, but here are some strategies you can use in your workplace to promote better sleep.

1. Set a limit on hours an employee can work in 24 hours and over seven days. This should include overtime limits.
2. Establish a minimum of ten to 11 consecutive hours off from work in a 24-hour period so people can get seven to nine hours of sleep.
3. Introduce flexible scheduling options.
4. Establish effective fatigue risk management systems.
5. Ensure fatigue-related factors are included in incident reports and investigations.
6. Provide workers access to a health care provider specialising in sleep disorders.
7. Offer employee assistance programs to provide people with resources and support for managing stress, anxiety, and other issues impacting their sleep quality.
8. Protect evening and night shift employees by not requiring their attendance at meetings or work functions during time off when they can be sleeping.
9. Create a sleep-friendly work environment by reducing noise, controlling light, and providing comfortable seating and workstations.

Ultimately, tapping into the power of sleep is one of the easiest ways to give us a better quality of life and an extra boost at work. When a workplace prioritises good sleep through education and the strategies we've mentioned, it creates a better workplace culture, increases the quality of work, reduces absenteeism and improves mental and physical health as well as making the workplaces safer. In short, we all benefit from the power of sleep in every aspect of our lives.

The information contained in this article is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended as health, medical, or financial advice. Always consult a qualified health provider or independent financial, taxation or legal advice specific to your circumstances and objectives.

Sources

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