

Sleep On It: Embracing Better Sleep for Wellbeing and Balance



Reading time:
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R U OK Day is an annual event in September which is a timely to remind our members how to improve sleep patterns and create a better work/life balance. Smart phones, iPads, laptops and all things that bleep, ping and flash for our attention are the culprits now impeding our sleep.

Both our daytime and night time hours are under assault

In her book *The Sleep Revolution* [7] Arianna Huffington, co-founder and editor-in-chief of The Huffington Post, writes: "Much of our society is still operating under the collective delusion that sleep is simply time lost to other pursuits."

"Our houses, our bedrooms – even our beds – are littered with beeping, vibrating, flashing screens. It's the never-ending possibility of connecting – with friends, strangers, the entire world, with every TV show or movie ever made – at the press of a button that is, not surprisingly, addictive."

Just two hours less sleep a night can have a major impact on work performance including[8]:



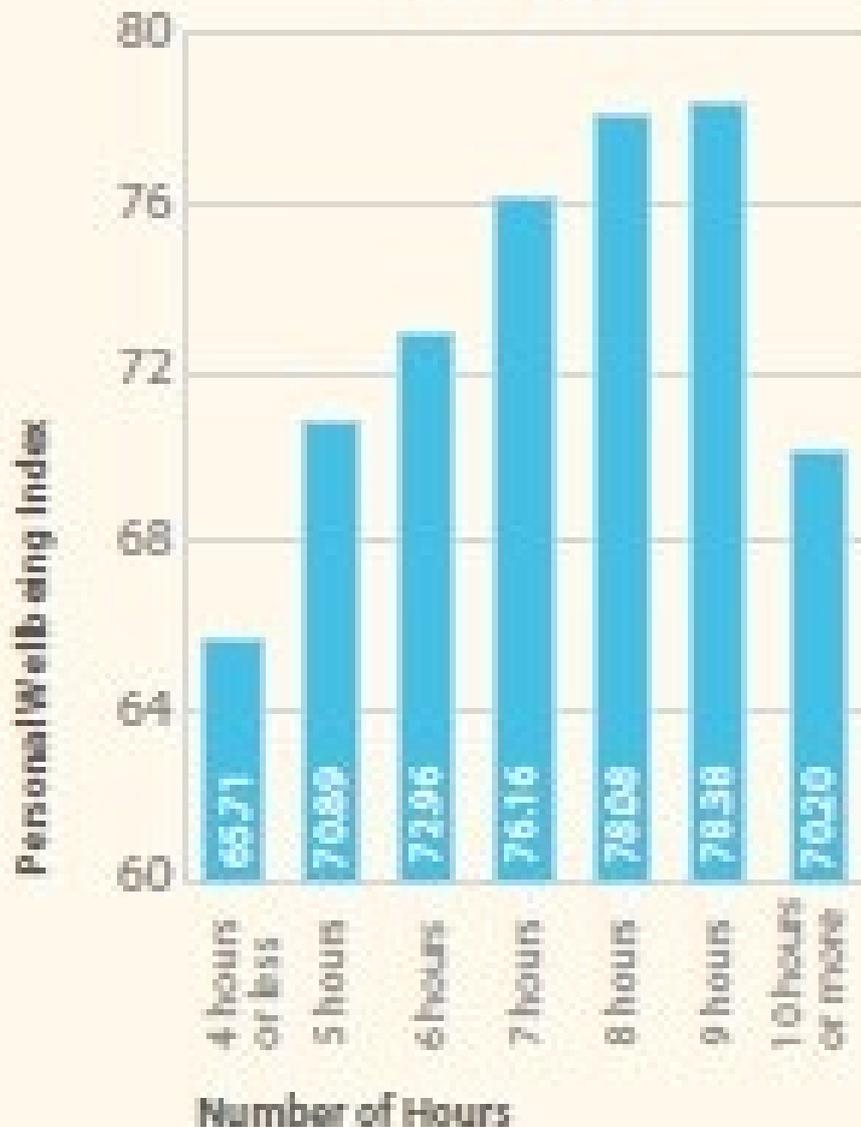
- Reduced alertness.
- Shortened attention span.
- Slower than normal reaction time.
- Poorer judgement.

- Reduced awareness of the environment and situation.
- Reduced decision-making skills.
- Poorer memory.
- Reduced concentration.
- Increased likelihood of mentally 'stalling' or fixating on one thought.
- Increased likelihood of moodiness and bad temper.
- Reduced work efficiency.
- Loss of motivation.
- Errors of omission – making a mistake by forgetting to do something.
- Errors of commission – making a mistake by doing something, but choosing the wrong option.
- Microsleep – brief periods of involuntary sleeping that range from a few seconds to a few minutes in duration.

This can lead to errors, accidents and injury. (Around 20% of fatal road accidents involve driver fatigue [9].)

Counting the cost of sleep deprivation

AVERAGE HOURS OF SLEEP IN 24 HOURS



Those of us who sleep six hours or less each night are more likely to have lower wellbeing, according to the [Australian Unity Wellbeing of Australians](#)[11] report. If you turn off the late night TV just an hour earlier to achieve seven hours' sleep, you could head towards the top of the normal wellbeing range.

In essence, lack of sleep can make you irritable, clumsy, unmotivated, distracted, indecisive and forgetful.

Alarming, there's evidence that less than six to seven hours' sleep a night significantly increases the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

According to Professor Dorothy Bruck from the Sleep Health Foundation[12], only recently have we begun to truly understand the scale of the health and social consequences of insufficient sleep and sleep disorders.

"Research suggests that if people are chronically sleep deprived it can affect their mood (with more chance of depression), sex drive and immunity (which means more colds etc.)," Professor Bruck says.

"Lack of sleep is also associated with glucose metabolism, thus more chance of diabetes, and weight gain and obesity. If the sleep deprivation is a result of untreated sleep apnea, a sleep disorder where breathing is continuously interrupted during sleep, there is an increased risk of heart disease and high blood pressure."

Sleep tips

- 1. Stick to a routine**
Try to go to bed at the same time every night and wake at the same time every morning. When shift work makes this impossible, at least create a pre-sleep ritual that you can do any time of the day or night.
- 2. Take care with food and drinks**
Avoid all stimulants like caffeine and alcohol for at least an hour before bed and finish eating at least two hours before bed.
- 3. Wind down and relax before bedtime**
Have a buffer zone before bedtime to review the day's activities and work out a plan of action for the next day.
- 4. Lower the lights**
Your body clock is affected by light, so turn off bright overhead lights and lamps and put aside your smart phone, computer or iPad at least an hour before bed.
- 5. Make sure your bedroom is comfortable**
Keep your bedroom quiet and dark with comfortable bedding suitable for the season. No TV in the bedroom!
- 6. Don't lie awake watching the clock**
Staring at the clock when you can't sleep actually increases the stress hormone known as cortisol in your body, making it more difficult to fall asleep. Try turning your clock away from you.

Source Sleep Health Foundation sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Switch it off at night. All. Of. It.

For a better sleep, simply turn off your mobile phone, tablet, computer, TV and any other gadgets with an LED screen. Put them well clear of your bed – preferably out of the bedroom altogether.

Sources:

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6. Can't Sleep: Causes, Cures and Treatments for Insomnia" HelpGuide.org
7. [Arianna Huffington](#), "The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life, One Night at a Time" 2016
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