



ANU Thrive



Level 3, Di Riddell Student Centre, ANU



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anu.edu.au/students/contacts/anu-thrive

Sleeping well

Good sleep is one of the most important elements for mental and physical health. University students are particularly susceptible to poor sleep – demanding assessments and irregular routines can lead to late nights and disrupted sleeping patterns. However, prioritising the amount and quality of sleep you get will make things easier in the long run.

Importance of good sleep

Mental health. Sleeping well maximises mental clarity and cognitive functioning, including alertness, your ability to concentrate, and memory performance. In addition, your mood can be affected by sleep. Poor sleep can lead to irritability, and long term sleep deprivation can contribute to mental health issues.

Physical health. Sleep is also critical for other aspects of your health, including immune function, recovery, and metabolism. Overall, while we have lots still to learn about sleep, it is known to be important for just about every bodily function.

Unfortunately, up to one in three Australians don't get a sufficient amount or quality of sleep. While there are many barriers to getting good sleep, there's also plenty you can do to improve it.

How to sleep well

Understanding how much sleep you need

There's some variability between people, so you need to figure out what's right for you. Generally, however, people require between 7 and 9 hours per night. Teenagers require more. Think about times where you've felt energetic and well-rested. How much sleep were you getting during that time?

You can also check out Healthline's [useful article](#) on calculating the right amount of sleep for you.

Consistency and oversleeping

Similar to not getting enough sleep, oversleeping can lead to problems, including – ironically – feelings of tiredness and lethargy. It's important to know that good sleep isn't just about the previous night, but your overall habits. For example, if you don't get enough sleep all week, and then suddenly sleep for 15 hours, you'll likely feel groggy and tired. The consistency of sleep is important.

Tips

Sleep quality is dependent on many different factors. You might like to try a one or more of these tips, depending on what you think might be preventing good sleep for you. This list has some basic tips and some more in-depth techniques, as well as links to helpful resources.

Stimulants. An obvious one – avoid caffeine prior to bed. Caffeine has a long half-life, meaning it can take a long time to be eliminated from your body. A good rule-of-thumb is to avoid caffeine up to 7 hours before bedtime (depending on individual sensitivity).





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Alcohol. It's true, alcohol can aid the initial stage of *getting to sleep*. However, it affects sleep *quality*, and will result in you feeling less rested the next day. Research has shown that even a small amount of alcohol prior to bed can negatively affect sleep quality.

Light at night. The light emitted from screens (e.g. phones, TVs, laptops) exerts a waking effect, possibly by suppressing melatonin secretion. Avoid screens as much as possible before bed. There's [some debate](#) about whether 'night modes' on devices actually help with this. Read Harvard Health Publishing's fascinating [blue light article](#) for more information.

Routine. Having a consistent sleep-wake routine can help with falling and staying asleep. One way to establish this is to consistently wake at the same time each day using an alarm. Then, falling asleep will be easier (plus, use some of the other tips to help with this).

Relax. Don't try to deal with difficult or stress-inducing things near bedtime. Either complete them earlier in the day, or give yourself permission to put them aside until the next day. Writing a realistic to-do list for the following day can help you psychologically defer these tasks.

Relatedly, try to do something pleasant and relaxing prior to bed. Having a bath before bed can actually signal to your body that it's time to sleep (check out Healthline's interesting [article](#) on that here).

Reading a book is a great way to mentally relax (plus it mitigates that blue light problem).

Nutrition and exercise. Sleep, nutrition, and exercise all impact one another. Eating well and exercising regularly can positively affect sleep. Just don't exercise too close to bedtime! Read more about these relationships in the Sleep Foundation's [useful article](#).



Check out Healthline's useful [sleeping tips article](#) for some more detailed information.

Stress, anxiety, and rumination

These can be barriers to getting good sleep. Anxious ruminating can prevent the onset of sleep, and, in turn, poor sleep can worsen anxious feeling and stress. If you think you may be having issues with stress or anxiety, it's a good idea to reach out for some help (see below for information on free counselling).

Meditation. Listening to a guided meditation can be a great way to relax before bed. There's plenty of free resources on YouTube, or you can check out paid apps. Spotify also has a variety of sleep meditations.

Write things down. Similar to above, you can try writing down anything that's concerning or worrying you and briefly considering a 'next step' to address it. Then, give yourself permission address it the next day – or later.

Focused breathing. One of the simplest things you can do to relax is to consciously breath deeply for a few moments. Check out WebMD's [progressive muscle relaxation guide](#) for more on breathing exercises.

Further resources and help

ANU Thrive is a student-led initiative offering students free, confidential consultations to discuss anything of concern, as well as a variety of events and informational sessions throughout the year.





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If you're having consistent difficulty sleeping, it's a good idea to speak to a doctor. They may be able to further investigate and assist with what's going on. Check out ACT Health's [Find a Health Service](#) to find a General Practitioner near you.

ANU Counselling. If your sleep is being affected by stress or worry, a counsellor may be able to assist. [ANU Counselling](#) offers free and confidential counselling to ANU students.

Online articles and information. Check out the following resources for more useful info:

- Healthline, [17 Proven Tips to Sleep Better at Night](#)
- Beyond Blue, [Sleeping well](#)
- Sleep Foundation, [Memory and Sleep](#)
- Sleep Foundation, [How Much Sleep Do We Really Need?](#)
- Better Health Channel, [Mood and sleep](#)



This guide was compiled by [ANU Thrive](#). ANU Thrive is a student-led initiative which aims to promote student wellbeing. You can [book a free consultation](#) with a student mentor or check out the [events page](#) for a range of wellbeing oriented events, activities, and info sessions.

