



# SLEEP WELL, LIVE WELL

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**S**leep experts believe that sleep is essential for bodily functions like restoration and repair, learning and memory consolidation, and immune function. Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep a night. Yet, recent surveys revealed that almost 75% of Singaporeans get less than 7 hours of sleep a night, and about half of Singaporeans are not satisfied with their sleep.

Common reasons and risk factors for poor sleep include: insomnia or other sleep disorders like obstructive sleep apnea, lifestyle habits and choices, physical illness and pain, life transitions, alcohol use, depression, anxiety and stress.

## What makes us sleepy?

Knowing what makes us sleepy will allow us to create the right circumstances for sleep and understand why certain sleep habits may worsen sleep problems. Two systems in the body regulate sleep:

### 1) Sleep/wake homeostasis (sleep drive)

Sleep drive accumulates while we are awake. The higher the sleep drive, the sleepier we feel. Sleep drive is depleted when we sleep. Accumulating sleep drive in the day and avoiding activities that lower sleep drive will help you feel sleepy at bedtime.

### 2) Circadian rhythm (body clock)

Our bodies run on an internal 24-hour clock that regulates our sleep-wake cycle. This clock is impacted by sunlight. Ensuring that your body clock is aligned with the external environment will increase your chances of sleeping well.

A third system, the arousal system, also affects sleep. Sleep is most likely to occur when arousal levels are low (i.e., we are relaxed). Stress and worry keep arousal levels high and prevent sleep even when the sleep drive and body clock are in sync.



## Five tips to improve your sleep:

- 1) Limit daytime naps to 30 minutes. Long naps deplete your sleep drive and affect night time sleep.
- 2) Keep to a regular schedule and avoid drastic variations to your sleep schedule. Frequent late nights may disrupt your circadian rhythm.
- 3) Have a relaxing bedtime routine and avoid using electronic devices with screens before bedtime. Light from screens can confuse your body clock.
- 4) Avoid watching the clock at night. Clock watching can increase stress and anxiety, thus keeping arousal levels high and keeping you awake.
- 5) Do not force yourself to sleep. Doing this often leads to the opposite effect of wakefulness as effort naturally triggers the arousal system.



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