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Tips for adults

Getting a good night's sleep

Many people struggle to get a good night's sleep at the best of times, let alone after a tragic event in our community.

The tips in this sheet may seem out of reach when it's not 'situation normal', but working on your sleep is one of the best things you can do for you, your whānau, colleagues and friends.

The following tips are for 'typical' adults but not necessarily for children or people with medical problems.

Improving your ability to get to sleep

- 1. Set a regular bedtime.*
Go to bed at approximately the same time every night, including weekends. If you're really tired, try going to bed slightly earlier.
- 2. Wake up at the same time every day*
Try to maintain your regular wake time, even on weekends – though up to an hour extra should not disrupt your normal sleep cycle.
- 3. Try to get some outside time and physical activity every day*
- 4. Nap to make up for lost sleep rather than sleeping in*
Have naps in the early afternoon, and try limiting them to thirty minutes.
- 5. Fight after-dinner drowsiness*
Try doing something to avoid falling asleep, such as washing the dishes, calling a friend, or getting clothes ready for the next day.
- 6. Make your bedroom 'sleep friendly'*
If you have a television in your bedroom, turn it off. Even the most relaxing programme or movie can interfere with the body's clock due to the continuous flickering light coming from the TV or computer screen.
- 7. Keep noise down.*
If you can't avoid or eliminate noise, try masking it with a fan, recordings of soothing sounds, or white noise. Earplugs might also help.
- 8. Keep your room dark and cool.*
Heavy curtains or shades can help block light from windows, or you can try an eye mask to cover your eyes. Most people sleep best in a room which is around 18°C and has adequate ventilation.

9. *Make sure your bed is comfortable.* Have enough room to stretch and turn comfortably. Your mattress and bedding are also important. Experiment with different mattress toppers, and pillows.

10. *Reserve your bed for sleeping.*
Your body needs to associate bed with sleep.

11. *Relaxing routines make it easier to get to sleep.*
A peaceful bedtime routine sends a powerful signal to your brain that it's time to wind down and let go of the day's stresses.

Relaxing bedtime rituals to try

- Read a light, entertaining book or magazine or listen to a talking book.
- Take a warm bath or a spa – but early enough or not so hot that you're still over-heated when you go to bed.
- Listen to soft music.
- Think about the things that provide sensory comfort and/or ease physical discomfort.
- A light snack (eg, a small sandwich with chicken or peanut butter; a small bowl of whole-grain, low sugar cereal; a banana; a cup of hot chamomile tea).
- Do some easy stretches or gentle yoga.
- Have your partner give you a relaxing massage.
- Before you go to bed, write a list of things you need to do the next day.
- Learn some relaxation techniques to help you get to sleep.

Things to avoid

1. Try not to eat late. Finish eating two or three hours before your normal bedtime.
2. Snooze foods you eat help you sleep. They're high in complex carbohydrates and low-to-medium in protein, eg scrambled eggs on toast, turkey pieces, peanut butter on toast.
3. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, spicy foods, sugar – they can rattle your normal sleeping pattern.
4. Avoid vigorous exercise late in the day.
5. Avoid arousing activities immediately before bed, eg work, paying bills, problem-solving.
6. Avoid exposure to bright light before bedtime.
7. Avoid activities that cause you anxiety and prevent you from sleeping.
8. Avoid or limit smoking.

Getting to sleep

If you don't fall asleep within about 30 minutes after turning out the light, get up, go to another room, and do something that is not too arousing (for example, read a magazine, listen to some gentle music, do some ironing). Stay up as long as you wish, and then return to your bedroom to sleep. The goal is to associate your bed with falling asleep.

Getting back to sleep after waking up

- Stay relaxed. The key to getting back to sleep is continuing to cue your body for sleep.
- Do a quiet, non-stimulating activity. Keep the lights dim.
- Don't stress about it. Concentrate on relaxation, not sleep.
- Avoid looking at the clock. Move the clock out of sight.
- Write things down. Keep a pad and pen or pencil beside your bed.
- Learn how to manage your thoughts.
- Set aside an earlier time to do your worrying.