Sleeping well is a huge part of feeling well but getting enough zzzzzs isn’t always easy. If counting sheep isn’t doing the trick there are some simple things you can try to make falling asleep – and staying asleep – more achievable.

**What’s a normal amount of sleep?** Experts have developed some guidelines regarding how much sleep we need. In general, adults should get seven to eight hours’ sleep per night. Because they’re growing so fast, children, teenagers and young adults require at least nine hours of sleep per night. The extra hours allow for a healthy development of the brain and body. When it comes to sleep, though, everyone is different. Some people need more than the recommended amount of sleep, while others can function just fine on less.

**How do I know if I’m getting enough sleep?** Most people nowadays are sleep deprived to some degree. Here are some signs that you’re sleeping well:

- You fall asleep within 20 minutes of lying down.
- You don’t usually wake up more than twice a night (which you may not even remember).
- You don’t feel tired during the day but refreshed when you wake.
- You’re able to stay focused and concentrate during the day.
- You have enough energy throughout the day and you’re not moody.

**Let’s start with the basics:**

- Stick to a routine of setting your alarm for the same time each morning and going to bed at the same time each night allowing for about 8 hours of sleep.
- Lay off the alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine before bed, as they can make it harder to get to sleep or may disrupt your sleep.
- Keep calm, but yes, you need to turn off your television, mobile phone and laptop or tablet at least 30 minutes before bed. The light from these devices can trick your brain into thinking it’s still daytime.
- Practice relaxation and meditation techniques to help you switch off your mind in the evenings. Smiling Mind is a free, modern meditation program with exercises that can help you reduce stress and relax.
- Try not to nap during the day.
- Exercise first thing in the morning, outdoors. Sunlight can help reset your body clock.

**Your environment**

- Create a sleep playlist with soft, gentle music to slow your heart rate and help you unwind.
- Check the room temp – is it too cold or too hot? Open a window, get an extra blanket, or change the air-con setting so that the environment is comfortable.
- Keep light and noise to a minimum. Wear an eye-mask, or just put a T-shirt over your eyes, to block excess light. If outside noise is disturbing you, wear ear-plugs or grab some headphones and play gentle music.

**Your body**

- Drink warm milk or chamomile tea to calm your body.
- Try some progressive muscle relaxation techniques.
• Practice deep breathing. Inhale deeply through your nose for seven seconds. Hold for four. Then exhale slowly through your mouth for eight seconds. Repeat.

Your brain

• If you’re stuck in a half-awake, half-asleep state, get comfy, close your eyes and try to stay awake instead of falling asleep. This disruption can trick your brain into resetting itself.
• Escape into your imagination. Give yourself an imaginary task, such as building your dream house or exploring a new city and walk yourself through it in your mind.

If nothing’s working

Give yourself a break. Turn on a dim light and read (from a book, no electronics!), do some light stretching, or walk around the house for a few minutes. Breaking the frustrating loop of not sleeping can help you reset and feel drowsy. Ensure that you’ve cut back on the coffee, tea and energy drinks. Download ‘Recharge’ - an app which offers a personalised 6-week program that’s focused on improving mood, energy and wellbeing by putting in place good sleep/wake patterns. If you’ve tried some of these suggestions and you still aren’t sleeping well, talk to your GP, a counsellor, psychologist or sleep specialist about other options.

Extract from Reach Out:https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-get-a-good-nights-sleep

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