CRANAplus improving remote health

Wellbeing for the Bush
HEALTHY SLEEP

Sleep is essential for health and wellbeing. However, getting enough can be challenging due to the demands of being a rural or remote health worker. Things like night shifts or being on call, insufficient breaks or days off, safety concerns and boundary issues can all make implementing basic sleep hygiene recommendations really tricky.

You know it's important, but what can you do to make sleep a health priority and create the right conditions? It takes practice to establish a healthy sleep routine.



Tips to improve your sleep

Get regular exercise, but not too close to bedtime

Prepare your sleeping area

Avoid napping during the day

Turn off screens at least an hour before bed

Keep it regular – go to bed and get up at the same time each day

Don't keep tossing and turning; get up and do something relaxing, then try again when you feel sleepy

Develop a relaxing pre-bedtime routine

Avoid alcohol, nicotine and caffeine

Sleep is essential to our emotional health, as well as for growth and repair within our body, and for normal learning and memory. Long-term lack of sleep has been linked to increased risk of depression, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and reduced lifespan.

5 tips for better sleep

Create a relaxing bedroom environment.



The bedroom should serve as a sleep sanctuary no matter what time you go to bed. This is particularly crucial for people who need to sleep during the day. The ideal sleep environment should be dark, relatively cool, and quiet. Make sure family members, roommates, or other cohabitants know not to disturb you during your allotted sleep time.

Establish a relaxing pre-bedtime routine.



Your routine may include taking a hot shower, reading a book, doing some stretching or a relaxation exercise. For help, check out apps like 'Smiling Mind' for relaxation activities.

Put the day to rest.



If necessary, write a list of what is on your mind and decide to think about it tomorrow. Learn a relaxation exercise if you have trouble 'switching off' at night. Practise the exercise before you use it as a sleep aid.

Try to avoid common disruptors.



Generally, avoid longer napping during the day as it may be difficult to sleep at night. Avoid alcohol, caffeine (including tea and chocolate), exercise and heavy meals in the hours leading up to sleep.

Synchronise your body clock.



Spending time outdoors (especially morning) may help to synchronise your body clock.

Tips for shift or on call workers

- As a rural and remote health worker it's not uncommon to work long shifts or be called into work multiple nights in a row. The effects of short-term disturbed sleep can impact memory, concentration, mood and decision making. It's really important to develop strategies to manage this. Find a relaxation technique that works for you and practise it, so you can use it when you need.
- If you normally work a night shift, schedule your sleep time to wake up close to the beginning of your next shift, rather than going to sleep immediately upon returning home. Studies have shown that the "split nap" schedule is also effective. This involves sleeping for a few hours when you get home from work, then staying awake and taking a long nap that ends close to the start of your next shift.
- Attempting to sleep during the day can be difficult due to factors like daylight and outside noise. In addition to dimming the lights, you can block outside light using an eye mask or blackout curtains. If your residence is located in a relatively loud area, try earplugs, a fan or air conditioner or a white noise machine to muffle disruptive sounds.

More information

Listen to our CRANAcast episode on this topic:
crana.org.au/cranacast_support

Sleep Health Foundation:
www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

MHA, Combating Sleep Difficulties For Healthcare:
workersmhanational.org/combating-sleep-difficulties-healthcare-workers

Black Dog Institute Tip Sheet:
Sleep, fatigue and stress in health care workers

Health Direct, Sleep for shift workers:
healthdirect.gov.au/sleep#shift-work