

## SLEEP TIPS

### Did you know...?

- Sleep helps you recover, build strength, improves your mood and emotional wellbeing, boosts your immune system and sharpens your focus.
- Poor sleep, especially over time, negatively affects your health and performance. It can increase your risk of injury and illness and compromise readiness.

### Build good sleep habits

#### Keep it consistent:

- Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Stick to your sleep routine where possible – even on weekends.

#### During the day:

- Get outside early. At least 10 minutes of morning sunlight helps set your body clock.
- Avoid caffeine after lunch, as it can stay in your system for hours.
- Cut back on smoking and vaping – nicotine is also a stimulant that can interfere with sleep.

#### At night:

- Limit screen time, especially social media, as it can keep your mind active when you're trying to sleep.
- Avoid alcohol as it reduces sleep quality.
- Avoid intense exercise.
- Avoid eating large meals close to bedtime.
- A warm milk drink before bed may help some people relax and unwind.
- Give yourself 30-60 minutes to switch off by doing something relaxing e.g. reading, stretching.

#### Optimise your sleep environment:

- Keep your room cool, dark, and quiet as possible. Eye masks and ear plugs can help.
- Dim lights to a warm glow where possible and avoid bright light if you wake at night.
- Avoid phones, laptops, TV and work in bed.

### Nap smart

**Take a tactical nap for 10-30 minutes no later than 1500.**

This short window can boost your alertness and cognitive performance while avoiding you waking up feeling groggy.

### Sleep banking

‘Sleep banking’ means getting extra sleep before a period of expected sleep loss, increasing your ability to cope with stress and fatigue. **In the week leading up to the activity, aim to get up 1-2 hours extra sleep per night.**

### Shift work

- Gradually start to shift your sleep time (circadian rhythm) to prepare for long periods of night shift.
- Keep a consistent sleep window and routine where possible.
- Mimic your daytime meals timings at night. Time caffeine for early in your shift and avoid consuming it within 4 hours of sleep.
- Use light strategically – bright on shift, minimise on the way home.
- Use a wind-down routine to cue sleep.
- Get into bed in the dark and use blackout curtains or eye mask to block sunlight.

### International travel

- Shift your sleep schedule towards your destination by an hour or two in the days leading up to your trip.
- Once there, seek out bright natural light in the late morning and early afternoon to reset your circadian rhythm.
- Keep naps short and avoid taking them after 1500.
- Use caffeine and exercise to help you stay alert throughout the day (avoid in the evening).

### Want to learn more?

Scan the QR code or head to the Defence Health Hub ([health.nzdf.mil.nz](http://health.nzdf.mil.nz)) for an interactive learning module, mini video series, sleep diary and other resources.



## When sleep isn't working

Only try to sleep when you feel sleepy, not just tired.

### If you're awake after 20 mins:

- Get up and do something calm. Keep the light low; avoid looking at screens or clock.
- Return to bed only when genuinely sleepy.
- Repeat as many times as needed.

### Tips if your mind won't switch off:

- Don't stress about not sleeping; avoid checking the clock.
- Label thoughts rather than following them e.g. 'that's a worry thought'.
- Write down thoughts or concerns, or create a to-do list – no problem solving, just offloading.
- Try one of the relaxation techniques below.

### Even after a bad night:

- Stick to your normal routine e.g. don't skip activity or training.
- Avoid 'catch-up behaviours' such as sleeping in.

## Progressive muscle relaxation technique

Try this while lying in bed:

- Tense each muscle group for 3-5 seconds.
- Relax for 10-15 seconds.

Work through:

- Left leg → relax
- Right leg → relax
- Both legs → relax
- Left arm → relax
- Right arm → relax
- Both arms → relax
- Face → relax
- Whole body → relax

Advanced:

- Breathe in while tensing
- Breathe out while releasing

## Self-guided imagery

Try this to induce calmness and feelings of being at ease:

- Think about a place where you feel relaxed and at ease.
- It can be imaginary or a place you've been to before.
- Include all your senses as you create this relaxing imagery.
- Build the sights and sounds that are relaxing.
- Imagine the smells and tastes that invite a sense of calm.

This place you have created can be there for you to return to each time you are getting ready for sleep.

## Mindful breathing exercise

Try this to calm the mind and prepare for sleep:

- Get in a relaxed, comfortable position.
- Take slow, deep breaths. Breathe in for about 4 seconds, and out for about 6 seconds.
- Feel the belly rise and fall with each breath.
- Count each breath to keep your mind from wandering. When you get to 10, start again at 1.
- Repeat 3-5 times.

**Tip: Practice using the guided breathing exercise on the NZDF ResCo app** (available on the App Store/Google Play).

## When to get support

**Your Defence Health Centre is a great first port of call for sleep issues and can provide a referral if required.**

Seek help if:

- poor sleep lasts several weeks;
- you're consistently exhausted; and
- your daily life, performance or mood is affected.

**It can be helpful to keep a sleep diary for 1-2 weeks and review with your NZDF healthcare professional.**

Download a template via the [Defence Health Hub](#) (QR code and link) on the previous page.