



Sleep Matters: Tips on How to Get More Sleep

Getting enough sleep is essential to overall health and wellness. In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) called insufficient sleep a public health epidemic.¹ The 2014 Fleet and Marine Corps Health Risk Assessment showed that unhealthy sleep increased with more time away from their home station and unhealthy sleep is considered a high risk factor among respondents.² Insufficient sleep can take a toll on energy, mood, and ability to function throughout the day. In fact, chronic insomnia can contribute to health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.³ Sleep problems, especially fatigue and daytime impairment, can compromise operational effectiveness.⁴

Although sleep needs vary from person to person, it is recommended that adults get seven to eight hours of sleep a day.⁵ Studies show that those who receive the recommended amount of sleep are able to learn and retain information better, and outperform daily activities than those who are not rested.⁵ Additionally, people who receive enough sleep are at a much lower risk for developing depression.⁶

Tips for Better Sleep

Below, find a few tips to help you get more and better sleep⁶:

Cut out alcohol before bed. Drinking alcohol before sleep will likely disrupt deep sleep resulting in only lighter stages of sleep. Heavy alcohol consumption could impair your breathing and cause you to wake up more frequently throughout the night.

Don't eat a large meal right before bed. A light snack can help settle your stomach but eating a large meal can interfere with your sleep if it causes indigestion.

Take note of the medications that may disrupt your sleep and avoid taking them at night, if possible. Some commonly prescribed heart, blood pressure, or asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter and herbal remedies for coughs, colds, or allergies can disrupt sleep patterns. If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Calm your nerves before bed. At the end of your day, unwind by reading a book, listening to music, or doing relaxation exercises.



If you can't fall asleep, don't stay in bed. If you are still awake after trying to fall asleep for 20 minutes or more, you may want to get up and do a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.

Tips for Sleeping after a Night Shift

When working a night shift, Sailors and Marines are required to stay alert and awake which can lead to restlessness and difficulty sleeping after their shift. A lack of sleep can lead to poor performance which, in the daily life of a Sailor and Marine, could result in serious consequences and impact fleet readiness. Traditional watch rotations, which do not account for circadian rhythm or sleep patterns, are a large contributor to fatigue, a common factor in many mishaps and near misses.^{6,7} The 3/9 watch rotation was developed to solve several issues by building the schedule around the people that execute it and the mission that it supports.⁷ Below, find a few tips on working the night shift and maintaining proper sleep:^{6,7}

- Add naps to your daily routine, when possible, to increase your total sleep.
- Modify your schedule to accommodate meals when not on watch and schedule your routine meetings in between 0900 and 1500 if possible.
- In your bedroom, remove bright lights and sound distractions for better daytime sleep.
- Don't drink caffeine during the latter part of your shift so you can fall asleep more easily after.

Understanding Your Sleeping Pattern

Getting enough sleep is extremely important to the health and quality of life for Sailors and Marines. A lack of sleep can lead to fatigue which can lead to mishaps on duty. One way to understand sleeping patterns is to keep a sleep diary, helping to identify sleep drivers. An example of sleep diary can be found [here](#). See a doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping. If you consistently find it difficult to fall or stay asleep and/or feel tired or not well rested during the day despite spending enough time in bed at night, you may have a sleep disorder.⁵ Your primary care provider can help you, and it is important to rule out other health concerns that may be disturbing your sleep.

References:

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