

Sweet dreams

How does sleep (or lack of it) affect your health?



29 August 2019

We know that getting a good night's sleep is important, but for many Queenslanders it's easier said than done.

Sleep health expert Dr David Burton said a lack of sleep affects more than physical health.

"When we have not had restorative sleep, our brain is unable to perform at an optimal level," Dr Burton said.

"Our physical, mental and emotional health is compromised as our brain, muscles, nerves, neurons and complex internal systems are slow to respond and unable to function or perform well."

"When we are sleep deprived, the neural connections used to form and consolidate memories throughout the sleep cycle are not able to fully develop and strengthen."

Consequences of poor sleep health can include difficulties with learning, memory, perception, motivation, maintaining focus and coping with stress.

Dr Burton said fitness trackers and smart technology should not be relied on to monitor sleep.

“True sleep monitoring requires monitoring of the brain, muscle tone and eye movements,” he said.

“This scientific monitoring includes measuring quality rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which is essential for brain recovery and a healthy mental state, and deep-sleep, which is crucial to body recovery and an essential precursor to physical fitness or training.”

Speak to your doctor if you are experiencing issues with sleep or fatigue.

Dr Burton’s tips to improve sleep health

- Develop a bedtime routine that includes 30 minutes of screen-free time before bed.
- Minimise night-time disruptions such as light and noise. Consider a sleep mask or earplugs if light and noise are an issue.
- Keep the bedroom a comfortable temperature.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before sleep as it can affect the time it takes to enter REM sleep.
- Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep.
- If you think you may have a medical condition or serious sleep disorder, such as sleep apnoea, speak to your doctor in order to get a correct diagnosis, treatment and support.

<https://www.racq.com.au/Living/Articles/Sweet-dreams>