



# Sleep & Wellbeing

## Tip Sheet

*AV Operational staff are often required to work shift work which can contribute to fatigue, sleep difficulties, and impact on health and performance. This tip sheet has been prepared as a resource to help with managing sleep.*

### Understanding Sleep

Sleep is as important as a healthy diet and regular exercise. When sleep is inadequate, it can lead to increased emotional reactivity and makes our feelings of stress and anxiety flare. When sleep quality is compromised, you may not be able to think clearly or make rational decisions, become prone to making mistakes, and can find your concentration impaired. Poor quality sleep can also affect our physical health, diet, motivation to exercise and immune function. All of this can impact on our relationships and overall functioning, and in turn can further compromise your ability to rest and get to sleep.

### Persistent Stress and the Flow on Effects

Being busy and having an active mind increases sympathetic nervous system activity and adrenaline production. In the short term, this can enhance performance and create the feeling that you can get more done. Yet continuing to function at this pace can lead to difficulties when it comes to winding down, with the effects of sympathetic nervous system stimulation beginning to appear: feeling fatigued, having trouble winding down, increased irritability and anxiousness all lead to the feeling of not sleeping well. Once people feel tired but have trouble sleeping, they associate sleep with a feeling of anxiety. They attribute tiredness to not sleeping well, when the real cause may be over-stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. The focus on sleep makes sleep more elusive: increasing the pressure you put on yourself to get to sleep creates anxiety which in turn worsens sleep and creates a vicious cycle. In fact, research published in the Journal Sleep demonstrated that persistent stress associated with being overly busy on a day-to-day basis was just as likely to contribute to insomnia as episodes of acute stress (Pillai, Roth, Mullins, & Drake, 2014).

*The **Ambulance Victoria Wellbeing & Support Services** is AV's internal mental health support service available 24/7 to all employees and their immediate family members, RANs, ACO's and CERTs providing 24-hour mental health and wellbeing support.*

### Getting a good enough night's sleep

1. Ensure that you are nourishing yourself, limit your intake of processed and packaged foods.
2. Hydrate! You are like a plant, with complex emotions.
3. Get outside for around 30 minutes a day – sunlight helps regulate circadian rhythms.
4. Move your body regularly.
5. Create a 'buffer zone' prior to your scheduled bedtime to prepare your mind for sleep and help you to identify and respond wisely to sleepiness cues.
6. Try to avoid alcohol and caffeine in the hours before bed.
7. Soothing activities such as listening to music can help create a state of rest for the mind and body.
8. Focus on rest rather than sleep. Sleep is like a butterfly: if you are still, it will approach you, but if you chase it, it will prove elusive.
9. A rigid routine can increase tension associated with sleep, so try to be flexible.
10. Keep your room at around 19 degrees.
11. Ensure you are able to block out the light.





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## Want to Get a Good Enough Night's Sleep?

There are evidence based practices and therapies to help improve sleep quality and manage symptoms of insomnia, such as **cognitive behaviour therapy**. Putting strategies in place earlier on means that you can work towards improved sleep and prevent the onset of depression and anxiety related symptoms which can develop once sleep problems become persistent. There is no need to quit your job or retire to the beach just yet, but it is important to manage your workload and give yourself permission to 'switch off', or disconnect. It is also important to implement some relaxation and mindfulness strategies as part of your wind down routine. Practiced regularly, mindfulness practices help to press pause, and tune into your mind and body so that you can recognise earlier on when things begin to feel overwhelming. The key to getting restful sleep lies more your daily habits than sleep related behaviours. Sleep hygiene is important, but so is your lifestyle: noticing how often you run on nervous energy, and allowing yourself the time to stop and pause, are just as important.

- Use white noise or a fan, or earplugs to reduce any distracting sounds.
- Invest in a regular mindfulness practice.

**Refer to professional support if necessary:** If informal support does not help, professional support should be sought quickly.

### References:

*The Sleep Hub*  
[www.sleephub.com.au](http://www.sleephub.com.au)

*Pillai, V., Roth, T., Mullins, H., & Drake, C. (2014). Moderators and mediators of the relationship between stress and insomnia: Stress chronicity, cognitive intrusion and coping. Sleep. 37(7). 1199 – 1208*

### Want to Learn More?

To hear more about this fascinating area of wellbeing, tune onto the **AV Podcast series** episode on **Sleep**. In this episode Dr David Cunnington, co-director of Melbourne Sleep Disorders Centre, specialist sleep physician, researcher, and advocate, shares his insights into the area of sleep, rest and the role of mindfulness in getting a good enough night's sleep.



# 1800 MANERS

1800 626 377



Option

- Peer Support**  
Talk to a caring, trained colleague who understands your experiences.  
[peer.support@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:peer.support@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- VACU Counselling Line**  
Confidential telephone support from a qualified counsellor (24/7).  
Find your nearest VACU Network Clinician.  
[vacu@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:vacu@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- AV Chaplain**  
AV's Chaplains provide compassionate support for your emotional, spiritual and pastoral care needs. This is a non-denominational service for everyone.  
[chaplain@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:chaplain@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- Bullying and Harassment**  
Confidential support and advice about bullying or harassment.  
[ProfessionalConductUnit@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:ProfessionalConductUnit@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- Police Statements & Court Attendance**  
Get help with police statements or an upcoming court appearance.
- Alcohol and Other Drugs Advice and Support**  
Talk with AV's AOD advisor about your options for support (8am-5pm).  
[AOD@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:AOD@ambulance.vic.gov.au)

