

SLEEP & MEDITATION

We all know sleep is crucial to our wellbeing, but loads of us still don't get enough of it. Here's how to achieve the magic number of good-quality kip...

Very few people are regular sleepers, in that they go to sleep and get up at exactly the same time each day. We all lead busy lives and, unfortunately, the one thing we - particularly students - tend not to prioritise is sleep.

Sleep is incredibly important for energy, mood and general wellbeing. As we sleep, our bodies have the opportunity to unwind and repair, allowing us to wake up and attack another day. It's likely that after a good night's sleep you'll feel alert, be able to make quick decisions, focus better and be more creative. On the other hand, not getting enough zzz's can cause long-term health issues and affect the way you think, react,

work and interact with others. In fact, sleep deficiency is linked with depression, obesity, anxiety and addiction.

Everyone functions slightly differently, but research suggests that around seven to nine hours per night is the magic number for most people. If you think that's too much sleep for you, just remember that there's a big difference between what you need and what you can get by on. If you feel tired in class or at any point during the day, you need more quality sleep.

Distractions from social media, gaming, outside noise or ticking clocks can leave you bleary-eyed each morning, so check out these tips on how to log more hours in quality slumber:

- Go to bed at the same time (as often as possible) and wake up (always) at the same time every day
- Exercise regularly and avoid caffeine from the afternoon onwards
- Minimise noise and light, and keep the temperature a little low (15-19 degrees is ideal)
- Use relaxation or meditation techniques before going to bed
- Avoid digital devices at least one hour before you turn in
- Use the 'do not disturb' function on your phone to limit late-night texts

MINDFULNESS

With so many demands on your time, it's easy to lose track of who you are and become disconnected from reality.

Many people are now seeking to regain control of their minds through practising meditation and mindfulness - but what exactly does that mean?

Mindfulness means living fully in the present, without judgment. It's about focusing on your breathing, being aware of what's happening in the moment, accepting whatever you're experiencing and letting it go. The best part? You can be mindful anytime, anywhere, no matter what you're doing. It sounds simple, but it's not always easy to do, especially when you're stressed.

If you start to experience a stressful situation or get stuck in a pattern of negative thinking, consciously practising mindfulness can help break the cycle. Believe it or not, your breathing is central to the here and now, and it's also central to the concept of mindfulness. By focusing intensely on that important bodily function, you can quickly tune in to your natural rhythm and start to feel calmer and happier.



HOW TO MEDITATE

1 Find a seated position that's comfortable but not too comfortable. This could be in a chair or on the floor. Rest your hands on your knees. You want to be relaxed enough to concentrate and be still for five minutes, but not so loose that you fall asleep.

2 Keep a tall spine. Inhale, roll your shoulders up to your ears. Exhale, roll them back and down. Every time you feel yourself hunching forward or slumping, reset your spinal position with this inhale/exhale rolling shoulder technique. If you maintain a

good posture, you're less likely to get tired and fidgety.

3 Gently close your eyes, and breathe slowly and deeply - breathing through your nose makes it easier to find a smooth, even pace. Focus on the area between your nostrils and your upper lip. Observe the sensation of the air entering and exiting your body as it passes over this spot.

4 Keep focus and observe without judgment. Often the mind wanders, so whenever you

notice that your awareness has drifted, gently guide it back to your breath. Make mental observations about what's happening around you. It's all about accepting, not reacting.

5 Don't go to your thoughts - let them come to you. Keep your mind open (like a blank slate) and welcoming of ideas.

"Believe it or not, your breathing is central to the concept of mindfulness"

