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# COPING WITH THE NEW SCHOOL DAY



**PRACTICAL ADVICE TO HELP YOU IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

## All about sleep

When it comes to your health and well-being, sleep plays an important role. It is just as important as diet and exercise. Over a 24-hour period, usually in response to darkness and light, you spend time both asleep and awake. As it gets dark, your body releases a hormone called melatonin that helps you to fall asleep. The amount of melatonin released reduces as daylight approaches, supporting you to wake up. This is called the sleep-wake cycle and it is an example of a circadian rhythm.

## How much sleep do I really need?

The amount of sleep you need is linked to your age. Research conducted by The National Sleep Foundation (1) recommends that the following ranges may be appropriate:

- School age children (6-13): 9-11 hours
- Teenagers (14-17): 8-10 hours
- Younger adults (18-25): 7-9 hours

Not getting enough sleep or having sleep difficulties can affect your ability to learn and your achievement (2) as well as your health and well-being.

## Tired of being tired?

The change to the timing of the school day may mean that you are getting up earlier than you were during the summer holiday or last year in order to arrive to start period 1 at 8am. In addition, research (3) has shown that teenagers have a delayed release of melatonin at night, which may mean that you do not feel ready to sleep until very late. These factors could mean that your current sleeping pattern is not allowing you to get the appropriate amount of sleep for your age group. As a result, you may be experiencing low levels of energy and tiredness up to mid-morning and again mid-afternoon.

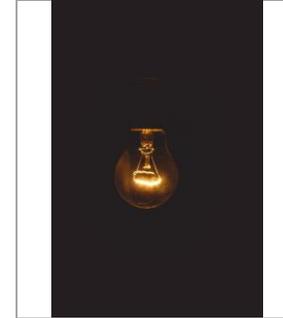
## Improving your sleep health

How long did you sleep for last night?  
Is this in line with the recommendations?

There are actions that you can take to increase the amount and quality of sleep that you are getting and help your body adjust to the 8am start. The following page identifies four practical strategies that you could try.

(1) Hirshkowitz et al. (2015) (2) Curcio et al., 2006 (3) Crowley et al. (2007)

## Light



Encourage your body to release more melatonin earlier at night by avoiding bright lights for an hour or so before bedtime. This includes both natural and artificial light sources including TV, tablets and mobile phones, which have been shown to delay the release of melatonin (4). When you wake up, open the curtains to allow sunlight to enter the room and turn the lights on if needed. This will let your body know that it is time to get up.

## Consistency



As melatonin is released at roughly the same time of day, it is beneficial to stick to a routine whereby you get up and go to bed at the same time; even on weekends and in the holidays! A major contributor to difficulties in the first few weeks of school is the dramatic change from a student's holiday routine. Set an alarm at the same time each morning and get out of bed as soon as it goes off. This will help train your body into a good sleep routine.

## Avoid caffeine



Feeling tired in the morning and having difficulty sleeping has been linked to the amount of caffeine you consume (5). Reduce this by drinking water or squash rather than Coca-Cola or energy drinks, choosing decaffeinated tea and coffee and eating less chocolate.

## Gradual change



You cannot change your sleep-wake cycle drastically in one night. Try moving your bedtime routine forward by 15 minutes each night and allow time for your body to get used to the new schedule. This may take a couple of weeks.

(4) Chellappa et al. (2013) (5) Orbeta et al. (2005)