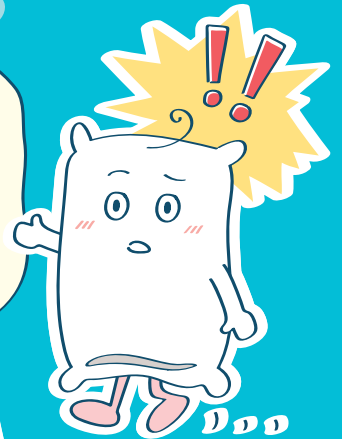


Sleep well, live well,

Sufficient sleep is the foundation of adequate physical and mental health. Despite individual differences, to maintain healthy and perform properly, studies recommend that the optimal daily sleep amounts are about 7-9, 8-10 and 9-11 hours, for adults, adolescents and children respectively. However, insufficient sleep is common in Hong Kong and has become a risk factor against health.



★ Importance of sleep

Essential functions of sleep include:

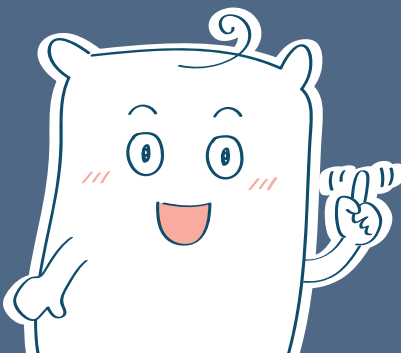
Promoting growth hormone production, regulating metabolism, and repairing injured cells.

Maintaining cognitions, comprising attention, working memory and emotional regulation.

Consolidating memory and promoting learning, problem-solving and creativity.



Contrarily, insufficient sleep harms physical and mental health, including worsening the immune system, attention and moods, etc.



★ Limitations of “sleep compensation” during holidays

Chronic failures to get the needed amount of sleep can accumulate a “sleep debt.” Experimental studies were conducted for healthy people, who first reduced sleep for one to two weeks and then resumed two to three nights of adequate sleep. It was found that their sustained attention, working memory, and reading comprehension abilities still failed to return to their baseline levels. Therefore, “sleep compensation” during holidays may alleviate the problems of insufficient sleep, but it cannot fully compensate for the negative consequences of “sleep debt”.

★ Sleep stealers

Bad habits cause insufficient sleep and poor sleep quality, and they include:



Using electronic devices before bedtime

Blue-light from digital devices can interrupt production of sleep-inducing hormone (i.e. melatonin), and therefore delaying sleep onset. So, try to stop using those devices an hour before sleeping.



Consuming caffeinated drinks or alcohol before bedtime

Some drinks, such as coffee, coke, black-tea or energy-drink, can interrupt normal brain and body functions for six hours or more, making sleep difficult. Alcohol seems to have relaxing effects, but it disrupts normal sleep cycle and produces frequent urination during night, causing poor sleep quality.



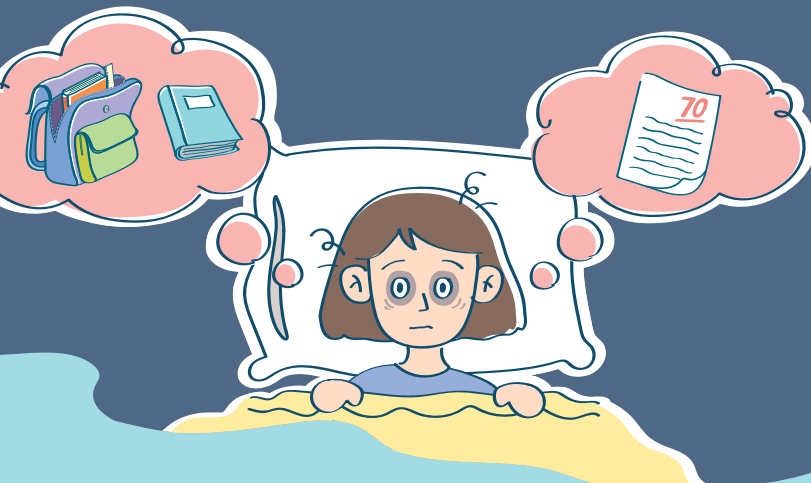
Being a Night Owl

Some students and workers study or work late at night. However, lacking sleep hinders memory consolidation and new memories will soon be forgotten. Also, being drowsy the next day will harm further learning. So, staying up late makes learning even harder.



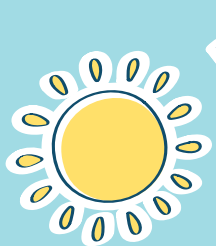
Struggling with stress

Constantly thinking about unfinished business makes us awake during sleep time. May briefly write down a to-do-list for tomorrow and then enjoy sleeping.



Healthy sleep

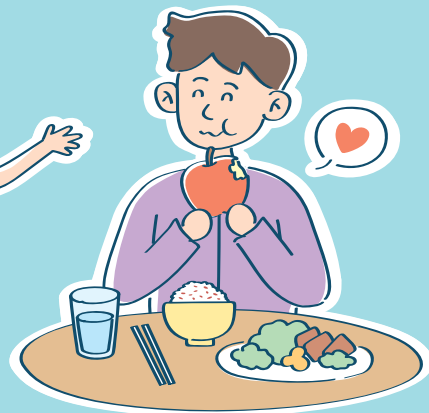
Tips to improve the quantity and quality of sleep are:



Exposing to sunlight appropriately, say, about an hour at morning to regulate the biological clock or dusk to promote melatonin secretion.



Keeping habits of living routines, balanced diet, and proper exercise.



Doing some relaxing exercise before sleep, such as walking or yoga.



Preparing a comfortable sleep environment, like dim lighting, optimal temperature and maintaining air circulation.

Managing insomnia

Proper medication and cognitive-behavioural therapy can treat and control insomnia. However, local studies found that about only 40% of adults and 10% of children and adolescents sought treatment for insomnia, reflecting that insomnia is often under-recognised and undertreated. If difficulties falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or feeling unrestful after sleep occur often, please seek help from your family doctor as soon as possible.



Sleep well, live well



The myth of sleeping