



Wellbeing Insights

But I don't need 7 hours sleep!

Regretfully, I was proud to share with my family, friends and colleagues that I didn't need 7 hours sleep a night. Sure, the national and international sleep recommendation is for healthy adults to get between 7 – 9 hours sleep per night, but not for me, I was fine with 6 hours or less if need be. I kind of wore a badge of honour that I can get by on minimal sleep, oh and by the way look how much I am achieving.

I'm in the process of changing my relationship with sleep! I think when someone says they 'don't need' a certain amount of sleep, that what they are really saying is that they can get by on a particular amount of sleep. But, getting by is not the same as getting what you may need. For a long time, I have got by on less than seven hours of sleep per night but I know there have been various costs to both me and my loved ones.

What's changed for me is exploring more of the recent research into the costs of a lack of sleep and the benefits of sleep. Unfortunately, many of these costs and benefits are somewhat hidden. The benefits to our immune system, to our learning and memory consolidation, to our emotional regulation, to the growth and repair of our cells whilst incredibly significant don't jump out at us in broad daylight as we go about our day. And the costs including a lack of focus, drowsiness whilst driving, poor decision-making, weight gain, depression and more we can often try and mask over and feel that that's just 'normal'.

So how much sleep do I need? How much sleep do you need? I wish there was a fancy new wearable technology device that made this crystal clear for each of us, but there isn't. My invitation to you is, instead of thinking what you can get by on, consider the quality of your wakefulness. It is possible for each of us to experience waking up feeling refreshed and alert and then to move through our day feeling focused, energised and truly 'awake'. For me, the warning signs of drowsiness whilst driving the car in the afternoon, falling asleep during a TV series or movie on the couch are all signs that I am not receiving the optimal amount of sleep my mind and body needs.

I've decided to make some changes, aligned with the research recommendations for healthy sleep. I wonder if from the list below, there is one thing you might like to try as you conduct your ongoing experiment as to what is best for your mind and body.

Some ideas:

- Increasing the regularity of your sleep. Setting a reminder for going to bed at the same time each night, both on weekdays and weekends.
- Reducing the temperature of your bedroom by a degree or two.



- Ensuring you get sunlight on your retina early in your day to support your circadian rhythm – you might like to have breakfast outside, or walk around your garden with a morning cuppa.
- Limiting the timing or the amount of caffeine, or alcohol that you consume.
- Reducing your exposure to screens after a certain time each evening.

As Professor Matthew Walker describes, 'sleep is the elixir of life', and I am certainly coming around to this way of thinking. I hope you can prioritise your sleep health and I recommend any podcasts or books from Professor Matthew Walker, Professor Judith Owens, Associate Professor Andrew Huberman to name a few. Also, the Sleep Foundation, Harvard Medical School and Mayo Clinic are excellent resources of research and information.

I wish you all a good night's sleep!