

how to manage

# sleep and gaming

for a healthy headspace

Sleep is important for our physical and mental health. Although it varies from person to person, if you're aged between 12–17 years, you should be aiming for 8 to 10 hours sleep per night and 18–25 year olds should try to get 7 to 9 hours.

Gaming and internet use can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can connect us with others, help us feel more socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can bring structure and routine into our lives as well as provide some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun, which is all good for our mental health.

However for some people, gaming and screen time can get in the way of having a good night's sleep, which can lead to other problems.

### what happens if we don't get enough sleep?

Trouble sleeping sets the stage for many problems. When we are not getting enough sleep it is harder to manage the stress in our lives, to keep anxiety in check and it can impact our mood. We will have less energy, be more irritable and even have poorer physical health.

Sleep gives us time for our brain to process all that we have done and learned during the day, so it's important for our development and concentration too.

If you are online when you would normally be sleeping, it may be time to start reducing your screen use. Not only does too much screen time take away precious sleep, but using technology before bedtime makes it harder to fall asleep, and can also reduce the quality of sleep, which can make us feel sleepier the next day.

Looking at screens before bedtime has a stimulating effect on our minds, because of the light (often blue coloured) reflecting from the device. It can encourage our minds to stay alert, which can interrupt our natural body clocks and make it harder to fall asleep.

### supporting yourself and where to get help

Good sleep habits take consistent practice. It can be tough when your sleep isn't great to get back on track, but there are things you can do to enjoy gaming and continue to get a good night's sleep, don't be disheartened if it takes a while it's worth keeping at it.



Turn off video games, screens and social media at least one hour before you go to bed. Set a bedtime for your device! Maybe have a bath, watch a movie, or read a book instead. Try a mindfulness exercise if you are having trouble winding down.



Lower the brightness on your phone and computer screens at night. Some phones have a night mode which is one way to do this.



Don't charge your devices in your room overnight. It can be tempting to keep playing when we should be asleep. Use an old fashioned alarm clock instead of your smart phone.



Try to have a regular amount of sleep each night. An extra hour, every now and then, is fine – but any more can confuse your body clock. If you need more sleep, go to bed a little earlier is better than sleeping in a bit later. In fact setting a regular wake up time and sticking to it is a good way to reset our body clocks.



Try not to nap through the day as this makes it hard to get your sleep wake cycle back into rhythm.



Get some daylight and exercise through the day, but don't exercise right before bed, it can keep you awake.



Leave some time to try a relaxation, meditation or mindfulness exercise.



Try to stay away from caffeine, cola, energy drinks, tea and even chocolate for a few hours before you go to sleep. Maybe try herbal tea instead.



### where can I get help?

If you think gaming or your internet use is getting in the way of a good night's sleep you can talk to someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, friend or family member. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information about sleep. You can also contact eheadspace, your local headspace centre, or Kids Help Line if you would like to talk to somebody about your internet use or sleep.



**The good news is that with some strategies and the right support, most people are able to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives, without it interrupting their sleep.**



**If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au), your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)**



**If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.**

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