

How can we ensure that we get a good sleep?

When we sleep we cycle between *deep sleep*, when our body repairs itself and prepares for the day ahead and *REM sleep* where our mind processes the events of the day and replenishes supplies of chemicals such as *dopamine* and *serotonin* which help our mood. **Both deep sleep and REM sleep are vital to our good health.**

Factors which can contribute to **sleep deprivation** include:

- Excessive noise
- Too much light
- Diet (including caffeine drinks)
- Strenuous exercise before sleeping
- Lack of routine
- Stress
- Not recognising the importance of adequate sleep
- Hectic after school schedules (including homework)
- Leisure activities such as television, computer gaming, mobile phones & the internet

Factors which contribute to a **healthy sleep pattern** include:

- Establishing a regular routine.
- Allowing enough time to meet your sleep needs.
- Maintaining a regular getting up time even at weekends, this helps set your body clock.
- Making sure that the bedroom is quiet and darkened.
- Ensure that the room is a comfortable temperature.
- Establish a soothing pre-bed routine, take a bath or practice relaxation techniques.
- Avoid stressful activities or emotionally disturbing issues.
- Avoid large meals and caffeine containing drinks before bedtime.
- If you need to snack try a banana, apple or a whole grain low sugar cereal.
- Do not have a computer in the bedroom, ensure mobile phones and televisions are turned off or outside the room.
- If unable to sleep leave the bedroom and undertake a quiet activity such as reading for 30 minutes elsewhere.
- If a nap is required try and ensure that it is before 3.00 p.m.
- Balance your fluid intake, you want to avoid being thirsty but you don't want to have to spend all night going to the toilet.
- Don't spend the night clock watching if you can't sleep, practice deep breathing or muscle relaxation instead.
- Where somebody has eliminated factors which inhibit sleep and has established a good pre-sleep routine but still has sleep problems a visit to a doctor or a sleep specialist may be required.