MHS Training Sleep for performance manual

mental
health + safety training

Sleep as a need & as a resource

All living organisms come into being with a set of needs. If those needs are met, then the organism will thrive. It cannot be unwell.

Living organisms also come into being with a set of innate resources that enable them to get their needs met in the environment in which they exist.

Human beings are the most complex known organisms in the universe, and it follows that we have the most complex set of needs along with the most potent set of resources.

We call these the emotional needs and resources.

A unique resource that humans possess is that of being able to access information and to be able to alter our future according to what we know.

If we know more about our need for sleep and what it does for us then we will be in a better position to sleep better and thrive in all areas of life. This utilises our innate, inborn resources to get our needs met more effectively.

The Sleep for Performance workshop and this booklet will support your understanding of your need for sleep and how it underpins the function of all your resources.

All living organisms exhibit some kind of sleep like behaviour.

When we choose to give ourselves the opportunity to sleep then we can plan it into our day.
This improves sleep quantity and quality.

The need for sleep

Throughout the twentieth century scientists considered sleep to be a dangerous waste of our time and resources. Even today, some still work to minimise or even eradicate our need for sleep.

They just could not understand why a sentient living organism, such as we are, would evolve to spend a third of our lives essentially unconscious. During sleep we cannot eat, hunt, learn, protect ourselves or our offspring.

How could this unconscious state possibly aid our survival or development?

What the scientists were missing was the understanding that without sleep, none of our waking activities are possible. Any waking endeavour quickly declines without performing the unconscious activities that take place during sleep.

Optimal sleep performance creates optimal waking performance.

Instead of minimising our need for sleep, we seek to improve our waking performance by improving our sleep performance.

In order to improve our sleep performance let's learn more about sleep and how it supports our optimal waking performance.

sleep need

Characteristics

Sleep comes to us naturally.
We know when we've been asleep, but what actually characterises sleep?

+ **Metabolically active –** Sleep is a metabolically active state. Vital bodily systems are unconsciously working towards recovery.
+ **Ordered –** Sleep activity is structured. It takes place in an ordered sequence that performs sleep function optimally.
+ **External perception –** When we are asleep external sensory gateways are shut and we are unaware of the outside world.
+ **Time –** After we have slept, we register that we have lost perception of time.
+ **Types –** Simply, there are three types of sleep that occur during a 90-minute cycle.

Rem – dreaming sleep that discharges previous waking period's unresolved emotional arousal.
Deep – Physical recovery healing organs, bone, muscle and soft tissue. Repairing neural cells and neurotransmitters or neurotoxins excretion.
Light – The transitional stages between wakefulness and REM and deep sleep.

Circadian rhythm

Most creatures evolved to make the most of the light from the sun during the day. While some creatures adapted to exploit the darkness, humans have adapted to exploit daylight to its fullest potential.

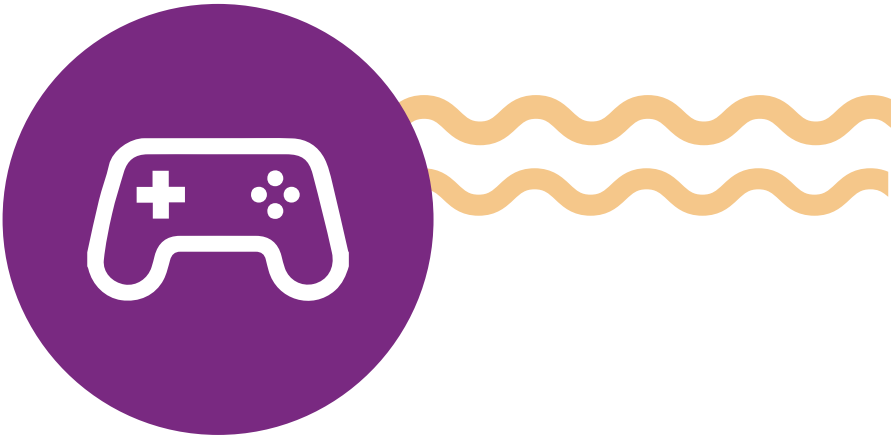
It is for this reason that it is optimal for us to be awake during daylight. That said, as the most adaptable living organisms we can still function well during the night. As we have adapted as a species, we have taken control of the night by creating artificial light.

We have changed our environment from the one in which we evolved

This change has shifted our sleep/wake cycle - our circadian rhythm. As with all human activities, we can adapt to changes in our environment and we are currently struggling to adapt to the changes that we are inflicting on our sleep. While illuminating our environment when it is dark conveys benefits, this change comes at a cost to our sleep performance.

Light at night impairs our sleep performance and therefore our waking performance.

Over millions of years we have developed to have our best sleep performance taking place during the night and our best waking performance during the day. The sun creates a spectrum of light called 'blue light' which photo-receptors in our eyes and skin register. The brain then releases neurotransmitters and hormones that promote wakefulness.



Light control

Any light other than starlight, moonlight or firelight signal to the body that it's time to be awake. A part of the brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus and another part of the brain called the pineal gland signal the release of the hormones: adrenaline and cortisol.

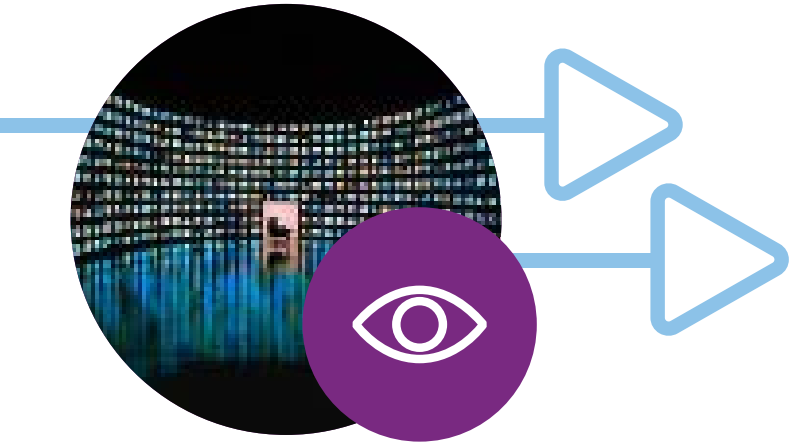
It's great to have these hormones released when we are waking up in the morning, as these give a kick-start to the day. If they are released in the evening though, the delicate rhythm of sleep and wakefulness is disrupted.

Circadian disruption is now normal and this comes at a cost.

As the day ends a hormonal cascade prepares the body for sleep. Artificial light and stimulus in all its forms are:

+ **Affecting hormones –** Stimulus is disrupting the release of sleep-initiating hormones, particularly melatonin and adenosine.
+ **Changing our choices –** We are now choosing to ignore these hormonal signals and sacrificing sleep performance in pursuit of stimulus.

Our brains are hardwired to be attracted to certain changes in our environment. Light, and moving lights, grab our attention like nothing else. Moving lights are patterns of information that stimulate us and allow our attention to be collected and harvested.



Control attention

Human beings have a finite amount of attention to give. We are unique in our ability to be able to control what we give attention to.

In the twenty first century, forces compete for our attention as a commodity; if we are looking at a commercial product then that product has successfully harvested some of our attention.

By stimulating us through screens, individuals and organisations attract and harvest our attention

The attention that we give is not always directed by our higher thinking selves. Sometimes our attention can be harvested by those who might not have our best interests at heart. When this happens then we risk focusing our attention away from sources that meet our needs.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in focusing our attention away from our sleep need.

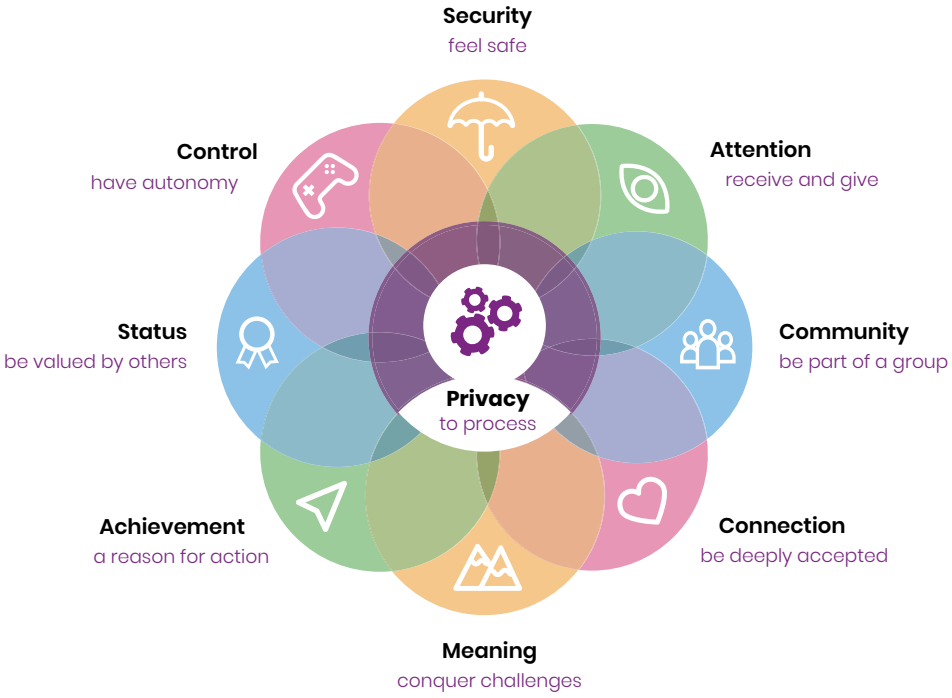
Activities and products compete for our attention and purport to meet needs, when really they are only serving themselves and their own agenda.

When our needs are met in balance, then we thrive. By meeting the need for sleep we empower resources to meet needs in balance. This means that we can focus attention on meeting needs more effectively.

the emotional needs

Below is a diagram of the emotional needs that all human beings have to some degree or another. When these needs are not met then we can experience stress which puts us at risk of physical and mental ill health.

When we are not aware of how our needs are not met, or even what they are, then we may be inadvertantly wasting our time and resources trying to meet them in wasteful, or even damaging ways.

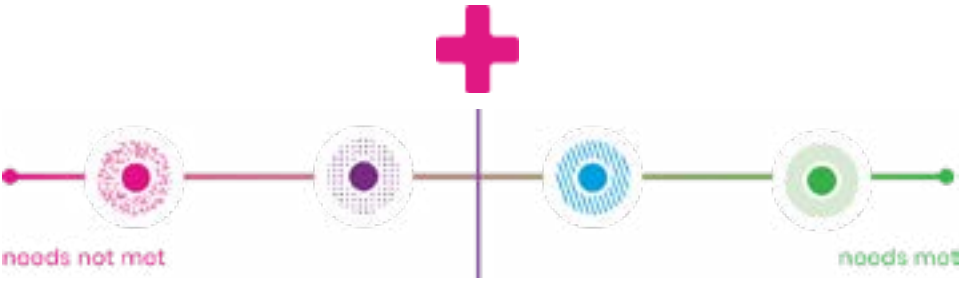


Which emotional need are you trying to meet when you could be sleeping?

the mental health continuum

Mental health and mental illness can be better understood as existing on a continuum. When needs are not met, and challenges outweigh our ability to meet them, then this is classified as stress.

Where stress is prolonged or extreme then we are at risk of the symptoms of mental ill health. Whenever the symptoms of mental illness are present they were always preceded by stress as defined above.



Stress is the crossover point to mental ill health
Sleep increases our resilience to challenges in our lives. If our capacity to meet challenges is diminished, they quickly become stressors and we risk mental illness.

When sleep is not a priority in our lives then there are various risk factors, not only to our mental health, but also to our physical wellbeing.

Sleep hygiene

In order to optimise sleep performance there are four categories of change that we can make. When we plan and imagine these changes taking place, then we give ourselves the best chance to improve sleep performance.

+ **Daytime changes**

+ Avoid caffeine after lunchtime - especially coffee
+ Caffeine stimulates the active branch of the autonomic nervous
+ system prompting the release of cortisol and adrenaline. It also
+ blocks adenosine, the neurotransmitter responsible for building
+ sleep pressure. When caffeine wears off, the rush of built up
+ adenosine can cause dangerous microsleeps.

+ Avoid eating near bedtime – if you're digesting, you're not resting
+ Eating a meal within two hours of bedtime burdens the digestive
+ system instead of allowing restful sleep. A fifteen minute walk after a
+ meal aids digestion and has been shown to support healthy
+ weight management.
+
+ Hydrate earlier in the day to avoid disturbed sleep
+ Drinking your two litres of fluid earlier in the day means that you are
+ less likely to wake up in the middle of the night to pee.
+ Check your pee colour to ensure that you are drinking enough fluids.

+ Move vigorously throughout the day
+ Discharging hormones and energy through moving throughout the
+ day means that you do not risk carrying stress hormones into your
+ wind down and sleep period.

Daytime changes

Brighten your environment during the day

When we are surrounded by bright light, preferably sunlight, we signal to our bodies that we should be awake and active. We evolved to make the most out of our ability to see light.

Be outside during the day - sunlight and fresh air

When we are outside, even on a cloudy day, we absorb the sun's rays which promotes wakefulness and the production of vitamin D.

Plan your pattern - create a sleeping pattern and bedtime routine

By using our higher brain functions when calm and awake, we can plan the optimum sleeping pattern for our lives.

Evidence shows that by setting a wake up time and sticking to it, then sleep quality improves. Your wake-up time should be five x ninety minutes after your sleep time.

Set an alarm for bedtime - set the time and the prompt to follow it

By setting an alarm you are committing to that bedtime and prompting yourself to take that action to improve sleep.

One alcoholic drink impairs sleep performance

By getting our needs met in balance and practicing emotional regulation skills we are able to calmly enjoy our evenings without alcohol. See the course Breath for Performance for breathing skills.

Strengthen the mouth and throat to improve sleep breathing

Snoring and low oxygen intake during sleep impairs sleep quality.

Wind-down routine

Create a routine – a sequence at bedtime that leads to sleep
The brain is a pattern-seeking organ. By creating a wind-down routine and sticking to it, the brain knows that when certain things happen they are followed by deep, restful sleep.

'Park' the day's concerns - write them down or discuss them calmly
When we write something down that is bothering us then we are taking control over it. This means that the brain can let it go, and close the book on it for the evening.
Talking this through can also be effective where reflective listening is present. See the Connect for Performance workshop for reflective practice skills.

Lower stimulus towards sleep - wind down towards your sleep time
Reduce the stimulus in the environment. Enjoy light conversation and relaxing activities to cleanse bedtime of sleep harming stimulus.

Shut down the screens - screens are never truly relaxing
Change your habits towards a screen free wind-down in the run up to bed time. Find relaxing, non-screen activities such as colouring or a board game to occupy yourself during wind-down.

Dim lights - emulate the sunset
Use dimming bulbs and turn lights off to emulate the setting sun. Dim your children's rooms and watch them yawn...

Make the bedroom a temple to sleep

Remove screens – remove objects that cause emotional stumulus
Screens and any light emitting object is sensed by the pineal gland, telling the brain to be awake.

Cool bedroom - 16-18c is the optimum temperature
Control the temperature and keep your bedroom cool if you can.

Keep the bedroom uncluttered - simplicity in the bedroom
The brain can relax if the environment is ordered and is not prompting action

Socks on - This helps you to get to sleep more quickly
Wearing our socks in bed can help us to feel more secure making it easier to fall asleep.

Background white noise – noise from a screen-free source
If we are used to sleeping with sounds, or if we cannot help bedroom noise pollution, such as traffic, invest in a white noise generator. This creates a background noise that may be calming.

Mattress and bedding –comfortable for sleep and posture
We spend a third of our lives asleep. Make sure it is in a comfortable bed that supports good posture.

Sunset simulator – emulate the sunset and sunrise
Dimming light signals that it's time for sleep. Special alarm clocks dim the light as you go to sleep , then raise light levels at the set time to emulate the sunrise gently nudging you into wakefulness.

+ **Make the bedroom a temple to sleep**

+ Bedroom blackout - Install a blackout blind or buy a sleep mask
+ The darker the bedroom the clearer the signal to your body that it is
+ time for sleep. If you are unable to darken the room fully, invest in a
+ quality sleep mask, preferably weighted.
+ Hide the clock face – avoid time anxiety
+ Sometimes if we are unable to sleep we refer to the clock
+ which feeds sleep anxiety. Turn the clock away so that you can
+ concentrate on relaxing and initiating sleep.
+ Boring books only - avoid stimulating reading
+ Books can be exciting. Ensure that bedtime books help you to sleep.

+ **Make the bedroom a temple to sleep**

+ Relaxation skills – practice 7/11 breathing at bedtime
+ Learn and practice relaxation skills. See Breath for Performance
+ workshop to improve skills that calm the autonomic nervous system.
+ Notebook next to bed to park anything extra
+ In case there is something on your mind, jot it down in a notepad.
+ If you cannot get to sleep - do something really boring
+ The brain may be stimulating you, looking for activity when you
+ know that it needs to sleep. If you are unable to sleep for twenty five
+ minutes, get up and do something really boring without reward.
+ Something pointless like cleaning the oven with a toothbrush.
+ It takes discipline, but continue and eventually you will be yawning.

The brain would rather be asleep than bored

the emotional resources - imagine

The emotional Resources

Our innate resources enable us to interact with the environment in order to get our needs met. We have the most powerful set of emotional resources in order to get our complex emotional needs met.

The imagination

An incredibly unique and powerful resource is the imagination.
Human beings have conscious access to this resource whereby we can picture and create things that have not yet come into being.

We can imagine emotions that we want to feel in a certain situation. We can also imagine how we might take action in a certain way.
This usess the imagination to create the behaviours that we know will serve us in the best possible way.

When we imagine ourselves doing something we know that we need to do, then we are fifty percent more likely to do it. Your rational mind has already worked out the changes that you want to make.

Now, by calmly imagining those changes towards better sleep performance, you can picture yourself actually carrying out your commitment to better sleep performance and prepare yourself for the rewards.

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Managing Mental Health + Safety

Connect for Performance

Sleep for Performance

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