

If that's what you're asking the ceiling at 3am, you're not alone. Sleep is taking a hit on a global scale, but the really uplifting news? Leading international experts are on the case. Here, they reveal surprisingly simple ways to start reclaiming rest, one peaceful night at a time

By Alex Davies

WHY AREN'T WE sleeping?

5am

Hello, early birds! 12% of Aussies get up before this time on weekdays, revealed a recent survey. Now that's impressive!



22%
of UK adults admitted to being impacted by their partner's sleep habits. Snoring has a lot to answer for!*

Three years ago, 1500 Australians were asked about their sleep. And they answered with a yawn: nearly a fifth weren't getting adequate or satisfactory shut-eye nightly, while 24% felt exhausted most of the week. Fast forward to now, where the Sleep Health Foundation is analysing data from a recent *re*-survey. "The percentages now look like they're growing," reveals Professor David Hillman, a leading sleep researcher and chair of the foundation. "It actually seems to be getting worse." Australia isn't alone. In a survey of 7,817 people in 10 countries by wellbeing company Philips, 57% admitted that their sleep could be better while 22% consistently wake before they'd like to. It's official: we're in what experts are calling a 'global sleep crisis'. Put simply, we're not getting enough and it's taking its toll on everything from our waistlines and mental health to work productivity. Health organisations aren't the only ones begging us to hit the hay. Arianna Huffington, co-founder of the *The Huffington Post*, is arguably the most well-known champion of the cause. After collapsing from exhaustion in 2007, the

journalist and author penned two books on the topic—*Thrive* and 2016's *The Sleep Revolution*. (She describes herself as a 'sleep evangelist' on Twitter and often sends #SleepRevolution out to her 2.3 million followers.) In her new book, she writes "[Sleep] is one of humanity's great unifiers. No matter who we are or where we are in the world and in our lives, we share a common need for sleep". Here's the tricky part, though: it's not like we don't *know* sleep is important. For 83% of Aussies in that Philips poll, improved health and wellbeing is why they want more slumber. The desire is there (just ask that commuter nodding off next to you!) so the question is this: why are we missing out at bedtime?

UNDER THE COVERS

There isn't one, simple answer but that inbox ping and Facebook alert have a lot to answer for. "The Internet produced a marvellous connectedness," says Hillman. "Now while others are sleeping, financial workers are up-to-the-minute with New York, and teenagers are excitedly gaming or messaging after midnight. The trouble is though, if you don't go to sleep, all these other activities

are compromised. A lot of us walk around in what's called a 'sleep-restrictive state', where you can function but not optimally." And as a phone alert reminds you to collect that parcel at lunch, we stumble across another factor influencing our nights—daily life. As well as a trip to the post office, you've also got 'help with homework' and 'get documents signed' on today's list. Oh, and have you booked that table for Sunday yet? "We all know the temptation of trying to fit more into the day," says Hillman. "Faced with those challenges, it's easy to think 'I'll just squeeze sleep a bit'. Often we know we're compromising and make it up a day later, but some squeeze sleep beyond the point of reason and think they're coping fine." Why it happens? There can be a level of perfectionism to it, explains Rosemary Clancy, clinical psychologist at Sydney Sleep Centre. "People can feel as though everything has to be done before they deserve to relax." She sees this in women, who can incidentally also thank hormone changes for contributing to insomnia. "During peri menopause and menopause, hot flushes can drag you out of a deep sleep. A woman might come to the clinic at age 48, never having had a problem with sleep before that." Sounds familiar!

*FROM A POLL OF 7,817 PEOPLE BY PHILIPS

WHY WE'RE RESTLESS

Whatever the trigger, something that often *perpetuates* a problem is pressure. We do all the right things (eat well, skip caffeine, ban watching Netflix in bed) then panic if they don't work. So, we try to catch up during the day, lie in (which throws your body clock out, making it tougher to sleep that evening) or just stay in bed, getting frustrated. "As you lie awake for more and more hours, you start to associate the bed with wakefulness," Clancy explains. "Anxiety and frustration becomes a part of the bed environment, so one thing we try to teach people is to reassociate their bed with going to sleep." One simple solution to try tonight? Give yourself a 20-minute rule: whether it's 11pm or 4am, if you're still awake after that period, get up, keep the lights low and do something unstimulating in another room until you're ready to return to kipsville. "It's hard because no-one wants to get up, but behavioural changes like that can take care of about 70% of the insomnia," she adds. "It doesn't happen overnight, though—making something a habit can take three weeks." Read: persistence is key, so stick with it.

A SOUNDER FUTURE?

Now, the major reason to be optimistic. While we toss and turn, the international sleep community is hard at work, investigating ways to help. Technology, while a sleep-enemy in some ways, has also revolutionised treatment. One example: as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is increasingly recognised as a great go-to for insomnia, more and more interactive web-based programs such as *sleepio.com* and *shuti.me* offer access to therapy without leaving home. It may not entirely replace a professional, but it's effective—and also a potential game-changer for those in remote areas. "There's also some interesting new light-pollution research coming out and a recognition of the role light plays in our sleep," says Clancy. A new study by the German Research Centre for Geosciences found 80% of the world's population live under skies full of artificial light, which mucks about with our body clocks and melatonin production. And when it comes to the blue-wavelength light emitted by your phone and tablet, apps like *f.lux* and *Twilight* block the blue and make screens appear reddish (red light is

less disruptive) in the evening. "New light bulbs are coming out of the US, which filter out blue light," adds Clancy. "They have an orange-yellow tinge, so they don't interfere with melatonin." Genius! Experts are making progress in treating sleep disorders, too. (FYI, it's believed 80% of people with one are undiagnosed, so check in with your GP.) "In the sleep apnoea space, there's a lot of research looking at alternatives to CPAP [a therapy that involves wearing a mask at night], which is very effective but not popular," adds Hillman. "There's a new method in the US that stimulates nerves that lead to the muscles of the throat, to help keep them awake while you sleep." It's seriously exciting stuff and a clear indication of something else fantastic—the world is talking about sleep. We're sick and tired of feeling tired, and ready for a change. Or as Huffington would say, we're ready for a revolution. So, while the experts work hard to help you take back the night, turn over for the surprising secrets that help *them* sleep soundly. One ticket to Dreamland coming right up!



40%
of surveyed Brazilians leave less than two hours between dinner and bedtime*

14%
of people in China take five or more naps a week*

15

SECRETS FROM
THE SLEEP
EXPERTS

REVIEW YOUR BREW

"I drink my 'restful remedy' as part of my night time ritual. Heat a small cup of milk, almond milk or water then mix with 1/2 tsp turmeric, 1/2 tsp black pepper, 1/2 tsp cinnamon and a bag of chamomile tea. The combination of turmeric and black pepper in a daily shot has been positively linked to better brain health." Dr Mike Dow, psychotherapist and author of *The Brain Fog Fix* (\$22.99, Hay House)

TRACK MINDFULLY

"I have a Fitbit that tracks my sleep and reminds me to do things like walk the dog, but I don't obsess about it. Technology that gets between people and sleep is not good, but tech that reminds them about what they ought to be doing is very helpful. A little bit of measurement goes a long way, but it's about striking the right balance." Professor David Hillman, Chair of the Sleep Health Foundation

TURN THAT ALARM
CLOCK AROUND

"... And don't look at it during the night. If I wake, I notice the urge to

look, then resist it! That habit can be hard, but you become so anxious once you see the time. Straight away you start calculating—how long have I got left before I have to get up? Looking at the clock creates more threat." Rosemary Clancy, clinical psychologist at Sydney Sleep Centre

NAG MORE OFTEN

"My greatest sin is not going to bed when I should—there's always something more to be done. Life is busy but as I tell my patients, having enough sleep will actually make you more productive. So, I recognise I'm not good at going to bed at a reasonable time and I ask my husband (who has excellent sleep habits) to nag me into going to bed. It works!" Dr Maree Barnes, President of the Australasian Sleep Association

PICK A PERSONAL
SNOOZE SYMBOL

"...Find a sleep talisman, an object that sends a clear signal to both your body and mind that it's time to slow down. Some of these I have used, others friends have told me about: an old-fashioned music box...; a weighted eye pillow lightly scented with lavender; a special little pillow with an image or a saying that resonates with you; a cozy robe or fluffy slippers." Arianna Huffington, author of *The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life, One Night at a Time* (\$35, Penguin Random House)

Be caffeine clever
"I drink herbal tea rather than coffee, particularly in the afternoon. Caffeine remains in your system for eight hours, and in some instances up to 14." Dr Libby Weaver, author of *Exhausted To Energized* (\$24.95, Little Green Frog)

BUY SMART BULBS

"Compact fluorescent and LED bulbs have become the norm over older, incandescent bulbs. But they also produce more blue light, the type that prevents your brain from producing sleep-inducing melatonin. I use LED bulbs in my kitchen but the ones in my bedroom are the traditional kind. And I use a store-bought, cheap dimmer for my night light so I can keep the bulb low to promote restful sleep." Dr Mike Dow

CREATE A RITUAL

"For 10 minutes before bed, I do one of the following: meditate to calm my mind, gently stretch to relax my muscles, some deep breathing to relax the nervous system or have a cup of chamomile tea, which is soothing before sleep." Dalton Wong, celebrity personal trainer and co-author of *The Feelgood Plan* (\$35, Random House)

KEEP THINGS COOL

"My bedroom is fairly cool—between 20 and 22°C. We have a rotating fan but live near the beach so it's cooler here than the city. There's data suggesting as long as you don't go below 18 and above 24°C, that's a good window of temperature for sleep." Dr Michael Breus, sleep specialist and author of *The Sleep Doctor's Diet Plan* (US\$15.99, Rodale)

TRAVEL WITH THE
THINGS YOU LOVE

"When I travel, I always bring my chamomile tea, my cup and my pillow. Often you don't sleep well the first time you stay somewhere new—one half of the brain stays semi-alert, ready to jump if needs be. A way to accelerate a feeling of safety? Replicate rituals from home." Dr Carmel Harrington, author of *The Complete Guide to a Good Night's Sleep* (\$29.95, MacMillan Press)

BREAK A SWEAT

"People tend to sleep better if they exercise regularly. I run two or three times a week, then do weights twice a

week. My daughter's keen on yoga so we go to a class most weeks, too. That and tai chi are very good because you're slowing your breathing and heart rate and getting out of stress mode." Dr Joe Kosterich, GP and health advisor to *Prevention*

SCHEDULE DAILY
WORRY SESSIONS

"Everybody has things to think about and plan for, and it's important to do those during the day so they don't keep you awake. Diarise your best time—for me, it's 2pm—for sitting down, planning, making lists, ticking tasks off, and so on. That way, those things are done when you're alert, rather than tired." Dr Maree Barnes

EMBRACE QUIRKS

"I have my French bulldog Hugo in the bed and usually end up petting him until I fall asleep. That's my way to wind down. He does snore, though. It's so funny—my wife says when she hears it, she just pretends it's a calming sound and it sends her right back to sleep!" Dr Michael Breus

BREATHE CALMLY

"If I happen to wake in the night (which is normal—up to 5% of total sleep time is spent in wakefulness) I breathe in for one, out for two and think about three things I can feel, see and hear. If that doesn't help, I accept it. I'll be tired, but I'll sleep tomorrow night and it'll be okay. I think of something else and often when you do that, you fall asleep anyway." Dr Carmel Harrington

TRUST YOUR BRAIN

"In a study, a man went without sleep for 11 days. Afterwards, over three recovery nights, his brain made sure he had more deep slow-wave sleep relative to light REM sleep. It adapted so he made up 11 nights lost sleep in three. Your brain is good at adapting. If you take the pressure off expecting your sleep to be perfect, your brain can do its job and get you what it needs." Rosemary Clancy. **P**

Bad night's sleep?

OVER TO SLEEP SPECIALIST DR MICHAEL BREUS FOR HIS TOP SEVEN WAYS TO POWER THROUGH THE NEXT DAY

1 LET THE SUN SHINE
GET UP AND HEAD OUTSIDE FOR 15 MINUTES OF SUNLIGHT TO STOP YOUR BRAIN'S MELATONIN PRODUCTION. ALSO, DRINK A GLASS OF WATER TO REHYDRATE—YOU BREATHE OUT NEARLY A LITRE OF H₂O WHEN YOU'RE ASLEEP.

2 TIME THAT LATTE
WAIT TO HAVE A COFFEE UNTIL 90-120 MINUTES AFTER YOU WAKE THEN, IF YOU NEED IT, HAVE SMALL DOSES EVERY FEW HOURS UNTIL 3PM.

3 DOWNLOAD A SMILE
DREADING THE DAY AHEAD? LISTEN TO A COMEDY PODCAST ON YOUR AM COMMUTE TO HELP CHANGE YOUR MINDSET.

4 REARRANGE LISTS
LEAVE TASKS THAT REQUIRE REAL FOCUS FOR TOMORROW. DO CREATIVE JOBS TODAY—CURRENT DATA SUGGESTS THAT BRAINSTORMING AND ALSO CREATIVITY HAPPENS WHEN WE'RE DISTRACTED AND SLEEPY.

5 MAXIMISE LUNCH
TAKE IT! GET DIRECT SUNLIGHT FOR 15 MINUTES AND AVOID HEAVY CARBS THAT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL TIRED. INSTEAD, PLATE UP SALAD WITH PROTEIN SUCH AS GRILLED CHICKEN OR FISH.

6 NAP SMARTLY
DESPERATE? NAP BETWEEN 1 AND 3PM, BUT NO LONGER THAN 25 MINUTES. IT HELPS REDUCE SOME OF THE SLEEP DEPRIVATION THAT'S BUILT UP.

7 DON'T CRASH EARLY
GO TO BED TOO EARLY AND YOU'LL LIKELY END UP LYING THERE WIRED AND TIRED. GO AT YOUR NORMAL TIME FOR THE BEST CHANCE OF FALLING AND STAYING ASLEEP. SIMPLE!