Sleep

In a 2018 survey of over 5,000 Victoria Police employees, less than 20% rated their sleep quality as 'Very Good' or 'Excellent'.

We tend to judge our sleep based on both **quantity** (i.e. how many hours we are asleep) and **quality** (i.e. how alert, rested, and refreshed we feel on waking). Both are crucial to maintaining physical and mental health.

When the quantity or quality of your sleep is affected, you may find yourself experiencing one or more of the following:

- Daytime tiredness, loss of energy, and apathy

- Problems with concentration and impaired judgement

- Difficulties managing stress, or feeling easily overwhelmed

- An increased risk of physical health issues e.g. heart disease, blood pressure, and diabetes

- Increased irritability and frustration

- Difficulty performing complex tasks, or more errors on tasks requiring speed and accuracy

- An increased risk of accidents on the road, and in the workplace

Keeping a sleep diary for one to two weeks can help you pinpoint what things are helping or hindering your ability to have a restful night's sleep. You can download a sleep tracking sheet from www.sleepaustralia.com.au. Alternatively, most wrist-worn fitness trackers monitor your sleep patterns, and provide daily information about your sleep quality

Many factors can impact on the quantity and quality of sleep. These include:

Environmental factors	Changes in noise, light, and temperature can make it difficult to fall asleep, and stay asleep.
Physical health	Several health conditions – such as sleep apnoea, and chronic pain – can make sleep difficult. More general health factors, such as nutrition and hydration, can also contribute to fatigue.
Mental health	Sleep patterns are disrupted by stress, and a range of mental health conditions.
Body clock disruptions	Shift work, daylight savings, and travel can all disrupt our 'natural' body clock.
Medications and alcohol	Any substance that acts as a sedative, or a stimulant, and affect sleep patterns and sleep quality.

Tips for improving your sleep

Whether you're working different shifts, or just find it difficult to fall asleep at night, there are many things you can do to optimize your sleep pattern and feel more rested during the day.

Optimize your environment:

- Make sure you routinely go to sleep in bed, rather than falling asleep on a couch or chair.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and at a comfortable temperature (15-18 degrees).
- Your bed should be primarily associated with sleep, and sex. Avoid working in the bedroom, or watching TV.
- Speak with your family. For example, put a copy of your roster on the fridge, so they can avoid noisy activities when you need to be sleeping.
- Speak with your children, and make sure they understand when, and why, you can't be disturbed.

Optimize your routine:

- Where possible, set a regular sleep pattern. Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day, including weekends.
- Even when working shifts, make sure you eat three healthy meals each day.
- Exercise regularly, and make sure you are out in the sunlight every day.
- Keep naps short and avoid napping after 3pm.

Adopt healthy sleep habits:

Before going to bed:	When in bed:
Avoid stimulants such as smoking, caffeine and alcohol, for at least 2 hours before bed	Avoid watching T.V or using devices. The bright light from screens reduce the brain's ability to produce melatonin, which helps you get to sleep
Have a drink of warm milk or herbal tea	If you find quiet reading makes you sleepy, read for a short time
Have a hot shower or bath. The rapid cool down in temperature afterwards relaxes the body and sets you up for a more restful sleep	Wear earplugs to reduce noise
Wind down before sleep by writing down any persistent worries. Give yourself permission to put these worries aside until the morning	Use apps that can provide soothing background noise (e.g. white noise, waves, rain etc.) that can help some people fall asleep
Use a relaxation technique or guided meditation to help you get ready for sleep, or play relaxing music	

Seeking help

Not all changes in sleep pattern are the result of an underlying health condition. However, it's suggested that you seek help if you have experienced the following, for a month or more:

- Even when tired, you find it hard to go to sleep, and can spend hours in bed thinking and worrying.
- You are feeling so tired during the day that you have difficulty concentrating.
- You consistently wake up during the night, and find it difficult to return to sleep.
- Having difficulty waking up / getting up, or wanting to sleep for long periods of time.
- Routinely waking up earlier than you need to, and finding it hard to return to sleep.
- Waking during the night feeling sweaty or anxious.
- Distressing dreams in which you may talk, toss and turn.
- Routinely using alcohol to help you go to sleep.

Alcohol and Drug Information Services VIC
1800 888 236

Turning Point
www.turningpoint.org.au

Police Wellbeing Services
1300 090 995