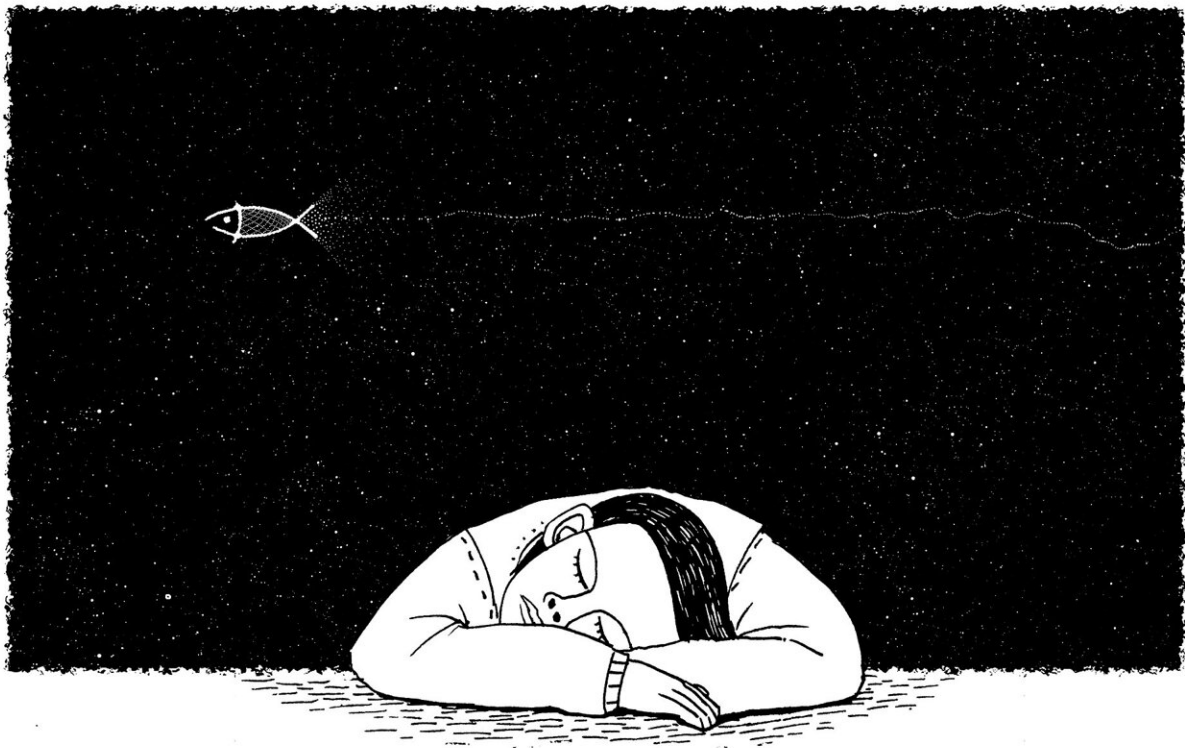# How getting a good night's sleep makes us more resilient

March 17 2022



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Getting a good night's sleep can help us manage our feelings and make us more resilient, according to sleep expert Dr. Jo Bower, at the University of East Anglia.

Dr. Bower, from UEA's School of Psychology, researches the link between sleep, mood and mental health, examining how different aspects of sleep can influence our emotional responses.

Her research has explored how our emotions are altered by heavily disrupted sleep among those in operating extreme conditions—such as in space or in the Polar regions.

She has also studied people's sleep patterns and moods through lockdown, how teenagers learn to control their emotions and regulate themselves as they cope with a "late sleeper" lifestyle, and the connection between body temperature, the menstrual cycle and sleep.

She said: "Instead of lying awake worrying, we're often told to sleep on it when it comes to making decisions. But there's actually a scientific foundation for this advice.

"Sleep and mental health have a well-established relationship. Not only can sleep problems occur before mental health problems, but sleep can also influence our responses to emotional situations and help us manage our mental health.

"Sleep is crucial for processing and consolidating memories from our day. When we have emotional experiences, sleep both helps us remember these events and remove the associated feelings.

"This happens in a stage of sleep known as rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. During REM, activity in most brain regions is similar to when we're awake. By reactivating memories during REM sleep, the associated feelings can be removed from the content of the memory. This is why 'sleeping on it' really can help you feel better in the morning.

"Not only that, but sleep also influences our daytime responses to

emotional events. Getting poor sleep makes us more likely to choose less effective ways of managing our emotions which could have a knock-on effect for our mental health.

"Getting a good night's sleep can work wonders for improving your mental health and wellbeing. But it doesn't stop there. Sleeping well can also improve our cognition as well as several aspects of our physical health. So, if you find yourself struggling while you're awake, now might be the time to prioritize your sleep.

Dr. Bower's top tips for a good night's sleep:

1. Maintain a consistent bedtime and wake time—even on your days off. This helps your body clock get into a routine, improving your sleep. Having a big shift in sleep time between your work and free days is known as 'social jetlag," which can be associated with increased anxiety.
2. Seek out natural light in the morning and avoid blue light in the evening. Our body clock is strongly affected by light. Getting natural light in the morning helps us to suppress melatonin, which improves our mood. The blue light found in electronic devices also minimizes melatonin. This means that using electronics in the evening can result in it taking longer for us to feel sleepy, so turn them off or set them to night time mode an hour before you go to bed.
3. Avoid certain substances such as alcohol, caffeine and nicotine. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants, which can interfere with our body's drive to sleep. Avoiding them in the afternoon and evening is advised. Alcohol also changes the structure of our sleep making us more likely to wake up during latter parts of the night.
4. Allow yourself time to wind down before bed. Make sure your bedroom is comfortable, cool, quiet and dark to minimize

chances of being disturbed. Before bed, try using relaxation or mindfulness techniques, which have been associated with improved sleep quality as well as better overall mental health.

5. If you can't get to sleep within 30 minutes, get up and do something you enjoy. Avoid going back to bed until you feel sleepy again. This will help you to establish a stronger association between being in bed and being asleep.

Provided by University of East Anglia