

Sleep is critical for sustaining the mental abilities you need for success in training and for performance. Even simple tasks such as communicating, driving, or plotting grid coordinates can be impaired by inadequate sleep (anything less than 7 - 8 hours every 24 hours). Airmen can correctly sight a target - but they might select the wrong target.

Air Force operations can create situations where inadequate sleep becomes the norm. Airmen who do not get enough sleep accumulate a sleep debt that must be paid off by getting the needed sleep. Make sleep a top priority for mission success.

#### Signs of Insufficient Sleep:

- Struggling to stay awake during mission breaks, guard duty, briefings, and driving.
- Difficulty understanding or tracking information
- Attention lapses
- Irritability, decreased initiative/motivation

#### Sleep Tactics for Air Force Operations

- Before**  Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep every 24 hours the week before the operation so that you start the mission with a full sleep
- During**  If possible, get 7-8 hours of sleep every 24 hours.
- If 7-8 hours is not possible, take naps and power breaks when mission permits to minimize sleep debt.
- After**  Get extra sleep each day to pay off your sleep debt and resupply your sleep bank.

# 10 Effective Sleep Habits For Warfighters



To Learn More on The HeRO Strategy And Ways to **MOVE, EAT & SLEEP** Your Way to Optimal Health, Visit:  
<http://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/Resources/Health-Promotion/>

Think of your daily activities. Which activity is so important you should devote one-third of your time to doing it? Probably the first things that come to mind are working, spending time with your family, or doing leisure activities. But there's something else you should be doing about one-third of your time—sleeping.

Sleep provides benefits that can improve performance and wellbeing and is not just merely a “down time.” Optimal sleep is about applying healthy sleep habits that promote and improve the quality and duration of your sleep for home, work and mission performance.

## 10 Tips To Better Sleep

- 1. Create a dark, quiet and comfortable sleeping environment.** Cover windows with darkening drapes or shades (dark trash bags work too) or wear a sleep mask to block light. Minimize disturbance from environmental noises with foam earplugs or use a room fan to muffle noise. If you can, adjust the room temperature to suit you. If cold, use extra blankets to stay warm. If you are hot, use that room fan both to muffle noise AND keep you cool.
- 2. Remove distractions from the bedroom.** Make sure your bed is comfortable and use it only for sleeping. Don't read, watch TV, or listen to music in bed. Remove all TVs, computers, and other "gadgets" from the bedroom. Don't dwell on, or bring your problems or emotionally upsetting arguments to bed.
- 3. Stop caffeine at least 6 hours before bedtime.** Caffeine promotes wakefulness and disrupts sleep.
- 4. Don't drink alcohol before bed.** Alcohol initially makes you feel sleepy, but it disrupts and lightens your sleep several hours later. In short, alcohol reduces the recuperative value of sleep. Nicotine - and withdrawal from nicotine in the middle of the night - also disrupts sleep. If you need help to stop drinking or using nicotine products, see your healthcare provider for options.

**5. Get your exercise in by early evening.** Exercising is great, but exercising too close to bedtime might disturb sleep. If you experience difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep after nighttime exercise, try exercising earlier in the day or evening (at least 3 hours before bedtime).

**6. Do not go to bed hungry.** A light bedtime snack (for example, milk and crackers) can be helpful, but do not eat a large meal close to bedtime. Also, empty your bladder before you go to bed so that the urge to urinate does not disrupt your sleep.

**7. Maintain a consistent, regular routine that starts with a fixed wake-up time.** Start by setting a fixed time to wake up, get out of bed, and get exposure to light each day. Pick a time that you can maintain during the week AND on weekends. Then adjust your bedtime so that you target 7-8 hours of sleep.

**8. Get out of bed if you can't sleep.** Only go to bed (and stay in bed) when you feel sleepy. Do not try to force yourself to fall asleep - it will tend to make you more awake, making the problem worse. If you wake up in the middle of the night, give yourself about 20 minutes to return to sleep. If you do not return to sleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something relaxing. Do not return to bed until you feel sleepy.

**9. Nap wisely.** Napping can be a good way to make up for poor/reduced nighttime sleep, but naps can cause problems falling asleep or staying asleep at night. If you nap and cannot fall asleep or stay asleep that night, cut back on your daytime napping. The best time for a nap or power break are when your brain clock is naturally primed for sleep: from about 2300-0800 and again from about 1300-1500. If you need to nap for safety reasons (e.g., driving), try to take a short (10-30 minute) nap in the late morning or early afternoon (e.g., right after lunch), just enough to take the edge off your sleepiness.

**10. Move the bedroom clock to where you cannot see it.** If you tend to check the clock two or more times during the night, and if you worry that you are not getting enough sleep, cover the clock face or turn it around so that you can't see it (or remove the clock from the bedroom entirely).