



Dr Sophie Bostock - “The Science of Sleep: How Sleep Works, and How to Make the Most of Yours”

1. Sleep and Energy: The Realities of Modern Life

Key Takeaways:

- Most working adults are not achieving the recommended 7–9 hours of sleep per night; over 80% reported less than 7 hours during the working week.
- Sleep deprivation accumulates, leading to measurable declines in reaction time, concentration, and overall performance—comparable to being over the legal limit for alcohol.
- The notion that one can “adapt” to short sleep was debunked; objective data shows performance continues to decline even if subjective feelings of tiredness plateau.
- Sleep is fundamental to energy management, and natural strategies to improve energy are preferable to reliance on stimulants like caffeine or sugar.

2. Sleep Architecture and Practical Strategies

Key Takeaways:

- Sleep consists of several stages: light sleep, deep (slow wave) sleep, and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, each with distinct restorative functions.
- Brief wakefulness between sleep cycles is normal, especially as we age or experience stress. The key is being able to fall back asleep.
- “Thought blocking” (repeating a neutral word) and “cognitive shuffling” (visualising random words) were suggested as techniques to quiet the mind and return to sleep.
- Managing nocturia (night-time waking to urinate) involves hydrating well during the day but tapering fluids before bed.
- Consistency in sleep and wake times (circadian rhythm) is crucial; exposure to bright light in the morning and dim light before bed helps regulate internal clocks.
- Warm baths before bed, avoiding heavy meals and intense exercise late in the evening, and short naps (ideally not in bed) were recommended for improving sleep quality.



3. Stress, Coping Behaviours, and Building Healthy Sleep Habits

Key Takeaways:

- Chronic stress and hyperarousal (fight-or-flight response) are major disruptors of sleep, increasing irritability, impulsivity, and risk-taking.
- Sleep deprivation heightens sensitivity to negative emotions and can make neutral social cues appear hostile.
- “Rehearsing relaxation” during the day—through mindfulness, nature walks, journaling, and predictable routines—helps switch from stress to rest mode.
- Building a positive “sleep identity” and confidence in one’s ability to sleep well is foundational. The placebo effect in sleep medicine is powerful: belief in good sleep can improve sleep outcomes.
- Tracking sleep habits, reducing caffeine and alcohol, and separating work from bedtime routines were recommended for improving sleep quality.
- Scheduling regular breaks during the workday can help manage stress and support better sleep at night.

Summary

This webinar delivered a thorough exploration of sleep science, blending research findings with practical advice. The session underscored the importance of prioritising sleep for energy, health, and performance, debunked common myths about sleep adaptation, and provided actionable strategies for improving sleep quality. Attendees were encouraged to adopt consistent routines, manage stress proactively, and experiment with simple behavioural changes to discover what works best for them. The overarching message was clear: small, sustainable changes to sleep habits can yield significant benefits for wellbeing and productivity.