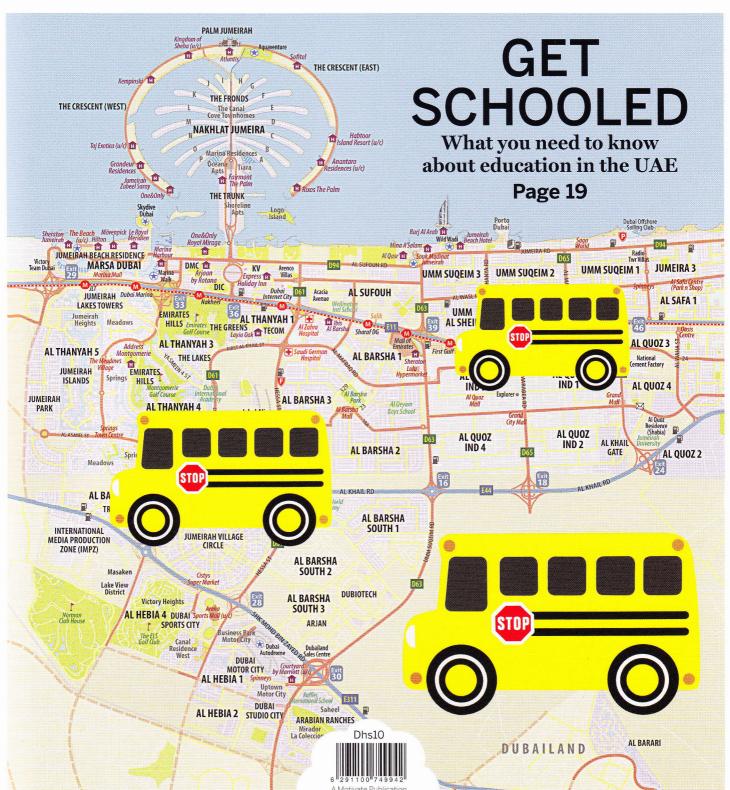


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HOW TO HAVE THE BEST NIGHT'S SLEEP OF YOUR LIFE

Recent figures suggest that around half the population of the UAE suffers from a sleep disorder. And with the debilitating effects of too little sleep ranging from headaches and irritability to obesity and a weakened immune system, there's never been a better time for a solid eight hours

The dangers of too little sleep

The damaging side-effects of sleep disorders make for – excuse the pun – eye-opening reading. "Mental function is highly affected by not sleeping well," says Dr Khaldoon Mozahem, Neurology Consultant at the American Center For Psychiatry and Neurology in Abu Dhabi.

"Impaired focus, performance and concentration can lead to things such as patients having accidents on the road or at work. At the deeper end, psychological issues could arise such as irritability, nervousness and an inability to properly function in social situations."

"In the worst case scenario, when long-term insomnia and sleeping disorders are not properly treated, patients can face severe physical problems such as reduced immunity, infection,

weight loss or gain and impaired motor skills," adds Dr Valeria Risoli, Clinical Psychologist at Dubai Physiotherapy & Family Medicine Clinic.

Lifestyle changes

The UAE's penchant for a late-night lifestyle can have a detrimental effect on your ability to get your recommended eight hours, with experts agreeing that eating, drinking, working, exercising and surfing the internet are all activities that interfere with your sleep patterns.

"Do not try to fall asleep playing Sudoku on your iPad," cautions Dr Risoli. "This is keeping you awake because of electronic stimulant lights and because you are engaging your mind in mental activities."

Dr Mozahem presses the importance of routine saying: "Go to bed at the same time every night

and set your alarm to wake up at the same time each morning, even on weekends," Dubai-based nutritionist Rashi Chowdhary suggests making the gym a morning activity. "Exercise releases endorphins which are very stimulating, raising our body temperature, which interferes with our regular sleep cycle," she explains. "So if you have insomnia, working out later in the day may not be the best thing for you."

Eat right for REM

"A late and heavy dinner can cause serious sleep problems due to indigestion, palpitations, acidity and sweating in the night," says Dr Maria Ridao Alonso, Managing and Medical Director at The Dubai Herbal and Treatment Centre. "An early dinner with a long 'fasting' period overnight promotes the release of growth hormone and gives your pancreas a break, which can help to prevent diabetes." And with cherries and walnuts rich in the sleep hormone, melatonin, and chicory, although bitter, a mild sedative, there are plenty of ways your diet can influence your sleep.

"Researchers have identified that there are different associations between sleep time and type of nutrients people consume," explains nutritionist Rashi Chowdhary. "Foods that are eaten towards the evening, after 4pm, have a greater effect on sleep patterns. Chemically speaking, when your carbohydrate consumption is reduced, your serotonin levels crash. Serotonin hormone is your happy hormone, it keeps you feeling calm and relaxed and this induces better sleep at night."

Snoozing at the spa Try this sleep-

Try this sleepinducing massage for a five-star slumber

Pillow Talk

Cocooned in a duvet atop of a heated bed, 'pillow talk' could quite possibly be the dreamiest massage you will ever experience. Yes, it's all about the zzzzz's, starting with feet dipped in a milk and lavender foot soak and ending with feet up and mug of warm cocoa in hand. In between, there's a deeply soothing massage (with lavender oil, naturally) - no kneading, prodding or stretching here. Rather, special pressure point massage techniques are applied to help you unwind and ease a weary soul into a world of unadulterated relaxation. Such are the sedative effects, we strongly suggest climbing into a taxi to get home - and into bed shortly thereafter. Zzzzzzzzzzzzz.

SensAsia Urban Spa, locations across Dubai, Dhs350 for 60 minutes. Tel: (04) 3498850. sensasiaspas.com



Four specialists reveal their top tips for a good night's sleep

PREP FOR BED

"When you start to feel drowsy listen to your body," recommends Dr Mozahem.
"Do relaxing things in the last hour before going to bed such as reading or listening to music. Don't work, use your laptop or watch TV."

SET THE SLEEP SCENE

"Your bed should be comfortable and warm," advises Dr Risoli. "The room should be quiet, dark and cool; if it is too hot you will sweat and wake up in the middle of night."

RELAX-ERCISE

"Valeriana is the herb that somebody can safely try to improve their sleep," says Dr Alonso. "And exercises like yoga and Tai Qi are the best options, because they work on body and mind."

SLEEPY SNACK

"If you want a small snack just before bed try unsweetened chocolate (80 percent cocoa) with one slice of cheddar cheese," suggests Rashi Chowdhary. "This combination generally works very well for sleep trouble due to stress-related issues."

Dream drink

MAKES 2-3 SERVINGS

Nutritionist Rashi Chowdhary (rashichowdhary.com) shares her recipe for a traditional Indian sleep tonic

8-10 almonds – blanched for 1 hour 2 tsp clarified butter or ghee 1 cup whole milk 4 soft dates ½ tsp cardamom and cinnamon powder Pinch of cumin turmeric and nutmeg

Put all ingredients in a blender and mix until it forms a smooth paste. Then bring it to a gentle boil on a stove. Stir and it is ready to serve. Add milk or water to taste.