

# SLEEP WELL



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STU RICHARDS, MANAGER, BULL FINISHING UNIT, WHATAWHATA

STU RICHARDS, manages 550 hectare bull finishing unit, Whatawhata

“Getting enough rest is really important in farming. Farming can be tough at times and there are risks. You need to have a clear head to make good decisions.

I try to stay consistent with my sleeping and go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time in the morning. I do that when I’m on holiday as well to make sure I maintain a good sleep routine.

I find this keeps my energy levels at a good point and just makes me feel better. It’s good to start the day feeling like you want to get out there.

Over the past year, my personal health has become a hobby of mine. I want to see my kids grow up and be there for them. So, these days I am making sure that I eat better, sleep well, get more time off the farm and look after myself. I’ve tried to work smarter, instead of harder and longer. I have realistic expectations of what I can achieve in a day and have learnt to prioritise and delegate.

Making a lifestyle change is about making a choice and deciding to live that way. If you work on these things consistently enough they become habits and you soon notice the positive impact on the farm.”



## Ten Tips For A Better Night’s Sleep



Here are 10 things you can do tonight that sleep expert Matt Beattie recommends for a better sleep. Find out what works for you and lock it in.

### 1 Devote 7 to 8 hours

Our natural body rhythms are designed to support a 16 hours awake, 8 hours asleep routine. The body and the mind get in trouble when this balance swings to the awake side and we start stealing from our sleep time to extend our time awake. Some reported famous short sleepers are – Winston Churchill, Maggie Thatcher, Bill Clinton and Madonna – but they are the exception. The odds that you could be a short sleeper are 1 in 10,000.

### 2 Catch the Sleep Wave

In the early evening our body gears up for sleep and releases melatonin from the pineal gland at the base of our brain to start the slide into sleep. It builds like an ocean wave and we need to prepare to get on it and ride it to enjoy a good night’s sleep. If you miss the sleep wave you can artificially re-create it by having a hot shower or bath, which triggers melatonin release. So go to bed early evening and catch the sleep wave.

### 3 Prepare mind and body for sleep each night

1. Limit how much alcohol you drink (no more than 2 standard drinks per day and none 2–3 hours before bed).
2. Limit your daily caffeine intake (tea, coffee and energy drinks) to 300mgs for men (two flat whites) and 250mgs for women. Don’t drink caffeine after 3pm as it takes up to 7 hours to metabolise.
3. No TV, smartphone or computer an hour before bed. The light they emit triggers the sleep/wake switch at the base of your brain and keeps you alert.
4. Try a hot shower or bath an hour before bed.

#### 4 Avoid taking worries to bed

Write your worries out as a list. Study each point and ask, "what evidence is there for that thought to be true?" If the evidence is skimpy, give it a low rating like 9 or 10. If there is evidence it's true, give it a high number, say 1 and make a plan to address it. For major issues make a note to get help and advice. Now re-write the list from 1 to 10. And watch how the lesser issues fall away. Then say to yourself, "OK brain, I've done it – I know what I have to do. Now, leave me alone and let me sleep!"

#### 5 Make sure your bedroom is suitable for sleeping

Make your bedroom inviting. Err on the cool side for temperature. Warm the bed up, but don't leave the electric blanket on. Make sure the room has curtains and keeps the light out in summer. The mattress needs to be fairly new as we create valleys and hills with our bodies over time and this affects posture and creates soreness. Make sure you have good pillows that don't crook the neck. Change the sheets and pillow cases weekly as the freshness is more inviting.

#### 6 Plan your wake up time so you wake up feeling refreshed

Each sleep cycle is 90 minutes long, so an ideal night is at least 7.5 hours or 5 sleep cycles. Aim to wake up from dreaming sleep, when your brain wave pattern is the most like being awake. This is the last 25 minutes of the sleep cycle. Do the maths as to when you should wake up to avoid waking out of deep sleep as this will make you groggy and you'll take an age to get going.

#### 7 Use sleeping medications sparingly

Sleeping meds can be useful to break a bad sleeping habit or if you are desperate and just need some good nights of sleep in a row. But don't become reliant on them. Make sure that a doctor has prescribed them because you should not be on sleeping meds for too long. Some are sedative in nature to relieve anxiety and over time can become addictive.

#### 8 Develop a sleep routine

The brain likes routine and we need to show it who is in charge to develop better sleep habits. Going to bed and getting up at the same each day is an important part of establishing a sleep routine.

#### 9 If you're not sleeping well, change your sleep habits

You can change things by developing a new sleep routine, such as going to bed 30 minutes earlier. The new routine will take 10 days to 2 weeks to settle before the brain fully accepts the new behaviour and becomes a habit. Stay the course and don't think that the change has occurred after one or two good nights.

#### 10 Protect your right to sleep

There's nothing wrong with the odd late night – we've all done it to watch a game of Super Rugby being played overseas or attending a birthday party! But if you short sleep yourself too often, say two or three hours less sleep per night, you'll build up a huge sleep debt and start having fatigue problems. Napping can be a useful short-term strategy to stay alert. A nap should not be longer than 25 minutes, otherwise you will drop from light into deep sleep. If you need a longer nap, then sleep the length of a sleep cycle – 90 minutes.

## How Tired Are You?

(circle the number that best describes you)

	NEVER 1	SOMETIMES 2	OFTEN 3	ALWAYS 4
Do you fall asleep in front of the tv?	1	2	3	4
Are you grumpy, at home or at work?	1	2	3	4
Do you fall asleep as a passenger on car journeys?	1	2	3	4
Do you sleep more on your days off?	1	2	3	4
Does your partner or friends complain you are not interested in doing things on your days off?	1	2	3	4
Do you have trouble following instructions?	1	2	3	4
Do you feel tired and have difficulty concentrating during the day?	1	2	3	4
Do you have to make an effort to do the things you used to enjoy?	1	2	3	4

Add up your score to find out your fatigue level.  
Under 10 – low fatigue, 11 to 18 – moderate fatigue, 19–32 – high fatigue

YOUR SCORE:

For further help addressing high fatigue or sleep disorders, seek advice from your doctor.

## Sleep and health

Research strongly suggests the majority of adults need to sleep between 7 and 9 hours a night. People who sleep less than 7 hours a night build up a 'sleep debt' that can affect their health. Lack of sleep lowers the immune system and increases our chance of illness. Over time, lack of sleep even increases the risk of early death.

Fatigue is caused by a range of things – poor sleeping habits, sleeping disorders, not taking breaks and too much alcohol or caffeine. If you are regularly tired, try to improve your sleeping habits.