

Sweet
dreams

Sleep tight,

That's the dream, right? These game-changing trends, tech and insights are set to make that a slumber reality

By Alex Davies

every night

Scroll Instagram and you'll likely spot a meme about sleep. There's the one about early nights: once a childhood punishment, now an adult goal (#truestory). Or the one about alarms being redundant because your problems will wake you up right on time. Only 45 per cent of us are satisfied with our sleep according to a recent Philips survey, so better kip likely appears on many a wellbeing wish list – but experts reckon there's still a way to go before shuteye gets the priority spot it deserves.

The culprits cutting into our snooze time include stress, health conditions, shift work, long commutes and – surprise, surprise – the always-on culture that sees us checking emails before that first pee. “We live in a 24/7 society and much of it is happening at the expense of sleep,” says Dr Sutapa Mukherjee, associate professor at the Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health and president of the Australasian Sleep Association. “I see a lot of people who are very sleep restricted [but] they're getting up really early to go to the gym – so the message about exercise and diet is getting through, but not so much about the importance of sleep for our bodies to function.” As Professor Danny Eckert, a leading sleep researcher and director of the Institute, adds, “Inadequate sleep adversely affects every organ and cell. Sleep is the most modifiable, preventative health measure any of us can imagine.” No wonder quality kip – alongside movement and nutrition – is considered a key pillar of wellbeing.

The dreamy news? Experts are hustling hard to improve our Zs, which means the sleep space has never been more exciting. Behold the trends and innovations here to make your bed(time) really rock...

1

Grown-up lullabies

Bedtime stories have come a long way since *Snugglepup and Cuddlepie*. Now, you can have **KEITH URBAN** serenade you (on the Calm app – **HARRY STYLES** will read to you, too), listen to a slumber hypnosis (with the Clementine app) or meditation (Smiling Mind and Headspace, plus the new **HEADSPACE GUIDE TO SLEEP ON NETFLIX**).

You can even drift off to a personalised lullaby via the **ENDEL PLATFORM**, which uses AI to generate a soothing “soundscape” based on things like your heart rate and the weather. The demand for audio aids isn’t slowing down: sleep-associated content on **APPLE MUSIC** is up more than 160 per cent globally since the beginning of the pandemic, with top playlists including Sleep Sounds, Bedtime Beats, Rain Sounds, Piano Chill and Pure Spa. Talk about eezzy listening.

2

Breathe-easy meds

Stop-start breathing during sleep; gasping, snorting or choking sounds; frequent wake-ups; loud snoring; daytime tiredness. These are potential symptoms of obstructive sleep apnoea, which affects around a million Aussies and happens when your airway becomes too narrow while you snooze. Not only does the condition leave you exhausted, it can lead to cardiovascular problems, road accidents and more. The go-to therapy is continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP to its mates), which involves wearing a breathing mask at night – but a whole new approach is on the horizon. “CPAP is very effective, but half or more of the people who try it are unable to use it or tolerate it,” says Eckert. “We don’t have a drug treatment for this very common disorder yet, but within the next five to 10 years, there should be medicines to treat sleep apnoea in certain people.” It’s all about jump-starting the airway muscles that relax and narrow during sleep, he explains. “These medications are trying to target the correct neurotransmitters so that, instead of relaxing too much, the muscles get activated – like they do [when you’re] awake – to keep the airway open and enable people to breathe comfortably during sleep.” Watch this space! And check in with a GP if you’re worried about nocturnal symptoms.

3

Digi tools

Imagine having a sleep pro at the tap of a button. That’s becoming a reality, says Eckert, who’s excited by the accessibility of new science-backed sleep tools. “At the moment, you’ve got to go through all these hoops to see a sleep specialist that isn’t accessible to everyone,” he explains. “So, being able to put [the help and knowledge] into user-friendly online tools is a huge game changer for the field. For example, there are now very effective ones for treating insomnia with cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), the evidence-based, gold-standard approach.” Check out platforms like Sleepio and Sleep Station, which use CBT techniques. There’s also the Soundly app, which uses games to exercise your airway muscles – a University of Minnesota study saw users reduce their snoring rate by 22 per cent. Result!



Pillow talk

4

Smart lighting & sound

It’s no shocker that your sleep and the aspiring DJ next door aren’t great bedfellows, but even sounds that don’t wake you could be taking a toll. Eckert’s team is exploring the impact of environmental noises (such as traffic sounds) on sleeping study participants. “We’ve developed very sensitive markers of what’s going on to their physiology,” he explains. “So, not just, ‘Are they waking up or not’ but also skin responses and what’s happening to their heart. We’re coming up with new metrics so we can get a better handle on that, because we think some of these more subtle disturbances can add up and be bad for your health long term.” It’s not just sound that’s piquing scientists’ interest: light is a huge focus, too, since “it’s so important for sleep and helping to regulate our circadian rhythms,” says Mukherjee. Imagine workplaces of the future where smart lighting is based on employees’ body clocks to promote energy, wellbeing and productivity. Or, hospitals where sound is used to support patients’ sleep, thus improving their outcomes. “[These insights] have enormous potential for the health of society,” confirms Eckert.

\$742 billion

The predicted value of the sleep industry by 2024 SOURCE: STATISTA

5

Hi-tech bedding

Remember when the most exciting part about bedding was your *The Saddle Club* doona cover? Now, next-gen mattresses, blankets and more are upgrading your rest. Bedding company Emma has launched the Emma Motion mattress (tipped for Oz release in 2022), which is fitted with AI sensors that follow and adjust to your sleep position. Meanwhile, the new Emma Diamond Hybrid Degree (available for pre-order) uses graphite particles to regulate your body temperature for sleep. Clever, eh? **Weighted blankets** have also gained momentum, according to sleep expert Olivia Arezzolo. "A paper in *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health* found 63 per cent of participants felt less anxious and 78 per cent felt more relaxed with a weighted blanket," she says. On a quirkier note, overseas you can find pyjamas, pillowcases and other sleepwear infused with cannabidiol (CBD). Fans claim this cannabis compound (it's not the one that induces a high) can help with anxiety and shuteye problems, although scientific research is still ongoing. All in all, bedroom swag has never worked harder.

6

Super trackers

Dr Bertalan Meskó has one of the coolest job titles around. As The Medical Futurist and director of The Medical Futurist Institute, he's a leading voice on healthcare technology. A big development that's encouraging us to ponder our sleep more? Trackers. "Smartwatches with built-in smart sleep alarms, under-the-mattress trackers and other wearables have initiated a behaviour change [among the population] that I haven't seen before," he says. Meskó dubs smart sleep alarms "the Holy Grail of health tracking." These apps monitor your nocturnal movement in relation to your sleep cycle, then rouse you at the optimal time during a set-by-you window. The idea is you'll wake feeling refreshed rather than groggy. Keen? Try freebies Sleep Cycle and Sleep as Android.

90%

Nearly this many of us agree that sleep is crucial for both physical and mental wellbeing

SOURCE: PHILIPS

7

Lucid dreaming

Y'know that feeling when you *know* you're dreaming as it happens? That's called lucid dreaming, and it's a big area of scientific intrigue. Sleep boffins are exploring how to induce this type of self-aware dream, the extent to which we can influence and alter the content, as well as its therapy potential for issues such as chronic nightmares. There's a way to go in the research stakes, but a 2017 University of Adelaide study suggests you can boost your chances of lucid dreaming by waking up after five hours, then repeating, "The next time I'm dreaming, I will remember that I'm dreaming" as you drift off again. Worth a go.

8

It's getting personal

Everybody's sleep is different, so support needs to be tailored and personal, says Mukherjee. "During the pandemic, some people have found their sleep improved, and others found it got worse, and I think that really speaks to the fact that it's not one size fits all," she explains. With that individual approach in mind, scientists are working to identify novel biomarkers that indicate how different people respond to sleep deprivation, so they can "detect who is most at risk of alertness failure and [a road] crash or injury," says Eckert. He also nods to the potential of emerging automated tools, in which experts can input a patient's specific sleep data or symptoms and then receive a targeted action plan in response. Now, that's the stuff dreams are made of.

9

Need Zs, will travel

Nap pods! Pillow menus! Sleep retreats! Yep, these are all on the agenda, as snooze opps continue beyond your bedroom. *MYND Studios in Sydney's Barangaroo* has nap spaces with different light settings to maximise your rest time, while *The Goodnight Co.* is hosting a Sleep + Beauty Retreat in Byron Bay this August (see thegoodnightco.com.au for details) complete with expert workshops and self-care sessions. For future overseas travel, consider a destination with your kip in mind. More and more hotels offer rest-specific features, from pillow menus and smart lighting to on-demand meditations and pro consultations. Take the worldwide Six Senses group, which serves up a personalised sleep protocol based on tracking, exercise, nutrition and relaxation. Utter bliss.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SERGEY FILIMONOV; MILLES STUDIO; ENIOLA BAKARE/UNSPASH; JUAN MOYANO



Reboot that body clock

Sleep-inducing yoga

If your pre-bed routine consists of mainlining *Mare of Easttown*, consider joining the sleep yoga club instead: Pinterest searches for the practice have increased by 90 per cent year on year. "There has been a spark of interest in practices that support quality sleep," agrees Sarah Routhier, a senior yoga teacher at Sydney's BodyMindLife, who has noticed an uptick in the popularity of restorative classes such as yin and yoga nidra. "Yoga nidra is most commonly translated to 'yogic sleep,'" she says. "It guides the body, mind and nervous systems into states of great rest, using a variety of body, breath and awareness techniques. I often use it in place of a nap to feel revitalised or to settle into a more restful night's sleep." See you on the mat. *wh*