

RISE

Breathe easy, you have the power to turn those black nights around, writes **Jenny Tarran**.

# How to clock in for sweet dreams



**N**EW parents are on the top of the list, shift workers are up high and so are people who are stressed.

These are the main sufferers of sleep deprivation or broken sleep, but SleepEasy counsellor Brenda Doherty says that with a bit of peace of mind, a good night's sleep is possible.

"The mind goes on and on and that leads to a wrestle with the mind and that is the barrier to sleep," Ms Doherty told *Rise*.

At best a bad night's sleep leaves you feeling drained, at worst it can be fatal, particularly when driving or operating heavy machines.

"It has been proven that we can't go long without sleep," Ms Doherty said.

When we sleep the brain dreams, and Ms Doherty holds that dreaming is our brain's way of filing away the information or the experiences of the day.

"Sleeping is the balance of waking," she said.

While there are no definitive figures on the amount of sleep a body needs, Ms Doherty said that in her experience most people aged 20 to 45 years needed about seven to eight hours, while about 15 per cent of the population would only need three to four.

"During adolescence [people] need 10 hours, there are a lot of things happening in the body and the mind, but as we age there is a

shift in biochemistry and from 45 onwards [our body] starts to support shorter sleep," she said.

While an over-active mind is the major cause of sleep deprivation, Ms Doherty said that many people just didn't make the bedroom a restful place.

"Other peripherals are body temperature, the slightest difference in bedding and room temperature can make a difference," she said, adding that most people made the mistake of having too warm a room or heavy bedding.

Ms Doherty runs SleepEasy courses around Australia, working with businesses doing training days through to private patients and even child-care centres.

She shows people how to relax, and what to do once they have laid down and closed their eyes.

"It's about how to get a handle on the mind. I'm getting people to understand the nervous system," she said of her courses.

"People become a victim of their system being on overdrive and even though many people who come to me have been doing relaxation exercises for years they aren't doing it properly with the mind."

Her course also explores the fundamentals of breathing, something she has found many people don't do properly.

"Once you go through the basics of breathing, that can be



BRENDA DOHERTY

transforming and I give people a clear idea of what relaxation is, the right understanding of what they are and should be doing."

While it may be hard to talk to a preschooler about the mechanics of the mind, Ms Doherty loves working with younger patients, as she finds them more open to focus on what goes on in their mind once they close their eyes.

She has worked with several day-care centres in Sydney, showing the children and the early childhood teachers how to settle down for naps and sleep time.

Her work with sleep came about after 25 years working as a counsellor and with stress management. She is an initiated yoga swami and worked for many years at a Buddhist monastery with stressed and terminally ill people.

"About six years ago more people

## SLEEP EASY

■ Make sure that the bedroom is dark but not too warm, and don't overload the bedclothes.

■ In the morning make sure that you get bright light to kick start your day.

■ The body calculates sleep debt, so if you are facing a busy day with a later bedtime, make sure you organise to get more sleep the night before.

■ Bad nutrition also plays a part in sleep problems so remember to eat healthily.

■ Learn to turn off your brain and find ways of combating stress.

were complaining about poor sleep so I have moved the focus to sleep, it all unfolded naturally from the stress work."

Learning to completely relax and turn the brain off is the fundamental skill for a good night's sleep and, surprisingly, what you do after you wake up also impacts on your sleeping habits.

"Get plenty of light in the morning to switch the night-sleep hormones off and turn on the day, happy hormones," she said.

■ Ms Doherty will run a one-day workshop at the WEA on October 29. The cost of the workshop is \$99 or \$89 concession (bookings on 4925 4200). Ms Doherty also runs sleep clinics throughout Australia and can be contacted on (02) 9977 0213 or visit [www.sleepeasy.com.au](http://www.sleepeasy.com.au).