Torbay and South Devon
NHS Foundation Trust

PATIENT INFORMATION

Insomnia and Migraine

There is a complex relationship between sleep and migraines.

Migraine frequently occurs with and is triggered by sleep disturbance.

Improvement of sleep problems in patients with migraine may result in an overall decrease in headache days.

77% of Headache patients from a sample in my clinic said that they had difficulty either getting to sleep or staying asleep. Of these patients 96% felt that their sleep difficulties impacted on their migraines.

It is important to know that there are many things you can do to help your sleep even if you have always had sleep difficulties.

It is often helpful to understand that short periods of waking each night are normal. Some people are reassured about this and so do not become anxious when they find themselves awake in the night. Also, remember that worry about poor sleep can itself make things worse.

Hypnotic drugs (sleeping tablets) are not usually recommended for use (other than in some circumstances) as there are concerns regarding their safety and dependency. Potential adverse effects include daytime sedation, poor coordination, cognitive impairment, and related concerns about the increased risk of driving accidents and falls.

Follow these 10 tips for a more restful night.

Keep regular sleep hours
Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day will programme your body to sleep better. It is better not to sleep later on weekends, as this can be a trigger for migraines. Also, it will not fully make up for lack of sleep during the week and will make it harder to wake up on Monday morning.

Cut down on caffeine
Cut down on caffeine in tea, coffee, energy drinks or colas, and chocolate, especially in the evening. Caffeine interferes with the process of falling asleep, and also prevents deep sleep. The effects can take as long as twelve hours to wear off fully so bear this in mind, also, when drinking caffeinated drinks earlier in the day. Have a warm, milky drink or herbal tea in the early evening.

Alcohol
Too much alcohol, especially late at night, can disrupt your sleep patterns. Alcohol may help you to fall asleep initially, but it will disrupt your sleep later on in the night.

Food and drinks
Do not over-indulge; too much food late at night can cause indigestion and interrupt your sleep patterns. Drinking too much fluid late into the evening can mean that you need to get out of bed to pass urine.

Smoking
Nicotine is a stimulant. People who smoke take longer to fall asleep, wake up more frequently, and often have more disrupted sleep. In addition, smokers often wake up too early in the mornings because of nicotine withdrawal.

Natural light
Do try and spend some time outdoors or in natural light during the daytime, as this provides an important cue to your brain for fine-tuning the timing of your body clock

Naps
Don’t take naps after 3pm as this can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

Create a restful sleeping environment
Your bedroom should be a peaceful place for rest and sleep. Temperature, lighting and noise should be controlled so that your bedroom environment helps you to fall (and stay) asleep. A bedroom temperature of 18-19C is ideal for the sleep of most people. It is recommended that you do not use technology during the hour before bed (this includes watching TV, using mobile phones, playing video games, using computers, and more).

Make sure your bed is comfortable
It's difficult to get restful sleep on a mattress that's too soft or too hard, or a bed that's too small or old. It would be sensible to recommend that you don’t use your bed for activities that could be done elsewhere (such as watching TV, studying), and try to avoid staying in bed if you are wide-awake.

If you cannot sleep, get up
If you cannot sleep, do not lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing (no screens) until you feel sleepy again, then go back to bed.

Try to relax before going to bed
Don't overschedule your day so that there is no time left for unwinding. Have a hot bath, which can help you relax, and the drop in body temperature after getting out of the bath can make you feel sleepy. Do mindfulness meditation, listen to relaxation apps (see below for resources), quiet music, or do some gentle yoga to relax your mind and body.

Exercise regularly
Moderate exercise on a regular basis, such as swimming or walking, can help relieve some of the tension built up over the day. But make sure you do not do vigorous exercise, such as running or the gym, too close to bedtime, as it may keep you awake. It is best to leave at least 3 hours between vigorous exercise and going to bed.
Further information:

Talkworks (previously Depression and Anxiety Service)
Talkworks offer sleep workshops, which look at the reason why you are struggling to sleep, and help to get you back on track. They offer guided self-help sessions and provide you with self-help material to take away with you. If you are feeling low or anxious they can also provide you with talking therapies to help you understand your worries, to develop strategies to help you manage them, and help you feel like 'you' again.

https://www.talkworks.dpt.nhs.uk/what-are-sleep-difficulties
or phone: 0300 555 3344

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/ - NHS Sleep and tiredness

https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/how-to-fall-asleep-faster-and-sleep-better - NHS: How to fall asleep

https://www.bighealth.co.uk/sleepio - Sleepio is a NICE recommended online treatment for insomnia

https://www.sleepstation.org.uk/articles/ - Sleepstation (learn more about sleep and insomnia):

https://pzizz.com
The Pzizz app can help you calm your mind, fall asleep fast, stay asleep, and wake up refreshed. It uses "dreamscapes" – a mix of music, voiceovers and sound effects designed using the latest clinical research – to help you sleep better at night or take power naps during the day.

https://www.headspace.com/meditation/sleep
Meditation for sleep is a specific, guided experience that offers a natural sleep aid so that you can rest the mind while simultaneously resting the body. In scientific terms,

meditation helps lower the heart rate by igniting the parasympathetic nervous system and encouraging slower breathing, thereby increasing the prospect of a quality night's sleep. Especially if you have insomnia or difficulty falling asleep, meditation has been shown to improve the quality and efficiency of sleep, how quickly you fall asleep, and how long you can stay awake during the day.

https://www.calm.com
Mindfulness for sleep, meditation and relaxation

More information:

https://www.migrainetrust.org/living-with-migraine/coping-managing/sleep/

https://patient.info/mental-health/insomnia-poor-sleep

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.