

Dealing With Sleep Problems

About 1 in 5 adults do not get as much sleep as they would like. Some adults are quite happy with 3-4 hours sleep a night, but the average is between 6-8 hours a night. As you age, your sleep efficiency (that is the amount of time you sleep as a proportion of time in bed) declines and older adults tend to sleep less than 6 hours a night. So everyone's sleep needs are different and sleep patterns will alter during the course of your life.



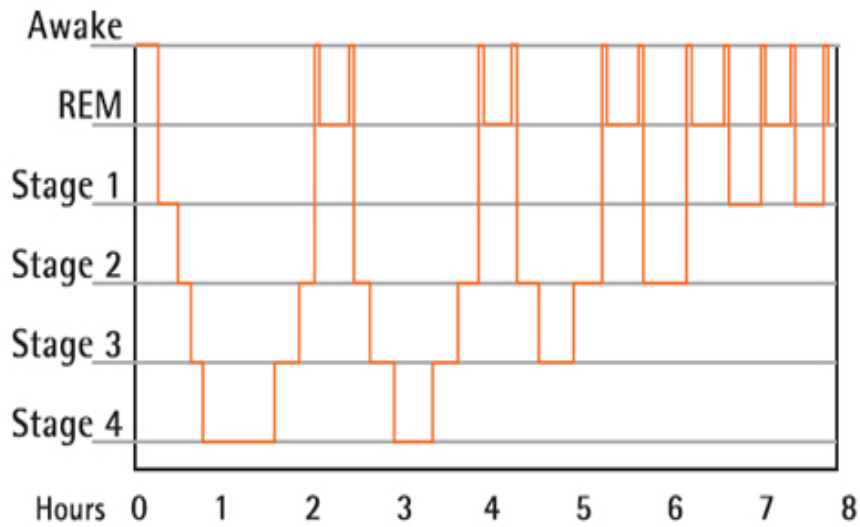
Some information on normal sleep

Despite being unaware of what is going on around us, the brain and the body are quite active during sleep.

We go through two main phases during sleep that serve different purposes. These are:-

1. Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is the stage in which the eyes can be seen to be moving under the eyelids. This is stage in which dreams occur. The body is normally 'paralysed' during this to prevent us from acting out our dreams.
2. Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM). known is that we start in this phase and go through 4 stages during it. These correspond to how deeply we are asleep.
 - Stage 1: Light Sleep (Transition between wakefulness and sleep)
 - Stage 2: Deeper Sleep
 - Stage $\frac{3}{4}$ Deepest Sleep (More difficult to awaken and takes time to become fully alert)

We begin in the NREM phase and after about 90 minutes move into REM stage of sleep. We then alternate between NREM and REM sleep throughout the night in a kind of cycle:



The Sleep Cycle

Many people are not aware that it is **normal** to wake for 1-2 minutes about every 2 hours during the night. These times of wakefulness become more frequent towards the end of the night. Normally you do not remember these times of wakefulness if they last less than 2 minutes. However if you are afraid of being awake you are likely to become more alert when you do wake and then these times of wakefulness last longer.

When you have been sleep deprived you do not necessarily need to make up hour by hour the time you have lost. The brain and body is skilled at compensating for this by moving more quickly into REM sleep and staying there for longer.

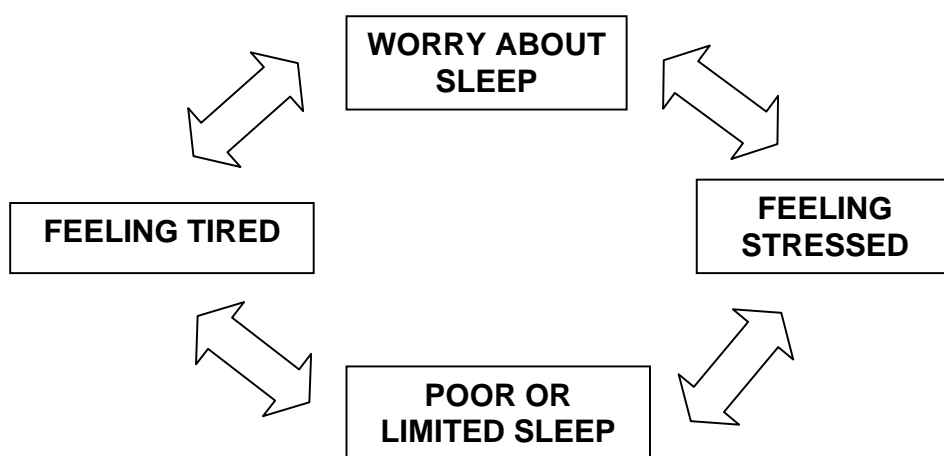
What Causes Sleep Problems?

There are normally a number of different causes of sleep problems: These may include:

- **Stress, Anxiety and Depression:** General worries about life can go round and round in your head, making you feel stressed and making it more difficult to sleep. Anxiety and depression can alter your sleep pattern, so that you may find that you are not sleeping at night, or when you do sleep well, you still feel tired all the time.
- **Sleep apnea:** Several types of sleep apnea exist, but the most common type is obstructive sleep apnea, which occurs when the throat muscles intermittently relax and block the airway during sleep. With this it is common to snore and wake up with a dry mouth, sore throat and a headache. Other people might notice that you seem to stop breathing for short periods during your sleep and then splutter on again. It is especially common in people who are overweight.
- **Periodic Limb Movements during Sleep (PLMS):** This involves having repetitive movements, commonly of the legs, during sleep due to muscle tightening or flexing. You may not be aware of this yourself but your bed partner will be!! Even so you will wake still feeling tired.
- **Some Medications** used in pain treatment may also affect people's sleep, either insomnia or daytime sleepiness. If you have concerns discuss these with your doctor. Sometimes simple changes like altering the time at which you take your medication can help.
- **Street drugs and some prescribed drugs can affect sleep patterns.** If you suddenly stop taking sedative type drugs (including over the counter medicines like Night Nurse or Nytol) you are likely to experience "rebound" poor sleep.
- **Increasing time in bed,** leads people to lose the normal association between bed and sleep. It is good to try and keep yourself 'trained' into using bed only for sleep and maybe making love.
- **Poor sleep habits,** for example varying bed times will interfere with the body's biorhythms. Taking day time naps will make the problem worse.

- **Doing less aerobic exercise and activity** affects sleep quality
- **Other physical illnesses**, for example those causing breathlessness can keep people awake.
- **Eating or drinking stimulants** can interfere with sleep. The three main culprits are:
 - Alcohol
 - Caffeine in tea, coffee, chocolate and some soft drinks
 - Nicotine.
- **Worries about lack of sleep** can lead to people watching the clock and repeatedly checking the time when they wake. This makes people more aware of their times of wakefulness and fuels their worry about poor sleep.
 - Expecting that you're going to sleep poorly and getting stressed about it can start to have more impact on sleep than the pain itself.

Whatever the original cause of insomnia a common vicious circle is:



Learning to manage sleep problems

There are three key ways to improve sleep:

1. Develop good sleeping habits to encourage sleep
2. Reduce worry about sleep problems
3. Reduce worry about other problems

We will look at each of these in turn:

Sleeping Habits

Developing a good sleep habit is sometimes referred to as sleep hygiene. Like all habits, they are difficult to form but once formed are difficult to break. This is one reason why it can feel like such a battle to sort out sleep problems that have become quite entrenched.

Below is a list of good sleep habits. If you tick the ones that apply to you then you'll know which habits you need to change.

TIPS ON FOODS AND TIMINGS	Tick if you need to tackle this
Have a fixed going to bed and getting up time. Your body has an internal clock and sleep is a natural biorhythm. Your body gets used to rhythms but only if you keep to a regular pattern. Stick to this pattern 7 days a week. You can revert to "lie ins" at the weekend once you have sorted out your sleep pattern.	
Do not take day time naps – however tired you feel. This interferes with your biorhythms. If possible engage in a distracting activity, like phoning a friend or going for a walk. If the sleep urge is overwhelming, limit yourself to 40 minutes maximum and do not nap after 3.30pm.	
Do not go to bed before 10pm. As noted above, the average person needs 6-8 hours sleep. If you go to bed before 10pm it is not surprising that you wake up in the early hours. If your normal bedtime is earlier, then increase your going to bed time by 20 minutes each week until you reach 10pm.	
Do not smoke or drink caffeinated drinks within 6 hours of going to bed. Nicotine and caffeine are stimulants.	
Do not drink alcohol within 4-6 hours of going to bed. Alcohol may make you fall asleep, but hours later when the alcohol levels in your blood start to fall, there is a stimulant or wake-up effect.	
Avoid heavy, spicy or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime. Like alcohol these can reduce your ability to stay asleep.	
Try a light snack before bedtime. Warm milk and foods high in tryptophan such as turkey or bananas may help you sleep.	

TIPS ON GETTING READY FOR BED	Tick if you need to tackle this
Do not take strenuous exercise within 3 hours of going to bed. However, a gentle stroll just before bedtime can aid sleep and regular exercise earlier in the day can be very helpful in promoting good sleep.	
Do not do any mentally demanding activity with 90 minutes of going to bed. Studying or finishing off work activities will delay your body winding down.	
Establish a pleasant preparation for bed routine. This may include a warm bath or a few minutes of reading. Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, soothing imagery or using relaxation CD's can also be part of this routine.	
Ensure the bedroom is sleep promoting. It should be quiet, dark and a comfortable temperature. If necessary use eye shades or ear plugs. Avoid brightly lit clocks and ensure curtains or blinds fully cover the window. Do not use the bedroom for working in and do not watch TV in bed. Only use the bedroom for sleeping or sex.	
Hide your bedside clock. Whilst you are tackling your sleep problem it is advisable to put your clock out of sight. Set it for your chosen getting up time, but do not allow yourself to "clock watch" during the night.	
If you don't fall asleep within 20-30 minutes – get up and go into another room. Try a relaxing activity such as reading and then return to bed when you feel sleepy.	

TIPS ON WHAT TO DO IF YOU WAKE IN THE NIGHT	Tick if you need to tackle this
Don't catastrophise. What this means is do not see the waking as a catastrophe. If you wake thinking "Oh no, I can't stand this" you will immediately become more stressed and more wakeful. Instead remind yourself that waking is normal. More information on changing thoughts is set out below.	
Use a relaxation technique. (see below for more information).	
Play soft music. If you are able to obtain a CD player with a timer then set it for 20 minutes.	
Get up if you are not back to sleep within 20 minutes. Leave the bedroom and go and read or have a milky drink. Do not engage in absorbing activities like crosswords, or watching TV. Return to bed when you feel sleepy.	

Setting a good sleep routine

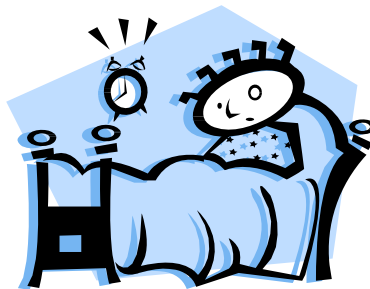
You may have noticed that the third tip on the list tells you not to go to bed before 10pm. If people have a long established poor sleep pattern it can take considerable effort to change it. To re-train the body, you may need to limit the amount of time you are spending in bed. This may sound contradictory, but it is about re-preparing the body for sleep.

The first step is to fill in the sleep diary at the end of this leaflet. This will indicate to you your average time spent sleeping (as opposed to the average time in bed).

If you normally sleep for around 5 hours, but are lying in bed for 8 hours, then you would reset the amount of time in bed to 5 hours. So if you normally go to bed at 11pm, but only fall asleep at 1am and then wake at 6am, you would change your going to bed time to 1am, but maintain your getting up time at 6am. Each individual needs to have a programme set for them. This will be discussed with your psychologist.

You would continue to keep the sleep diary to monitor your sleep pattern. When you achieve 90% of the time in bed being asleep, then the allowed time spent in bed is increased by 15 minutes, by going to bed 15 minutes earlier. In the above example, you would then go to bed at quarter to one.

Again when you reach 90% of the time being asleep, you bring forward the going to bed time by another 15 minutes. This pattern is maintained until you reach an amount of time sleeping that is suitable for you.



Healthy Living to Help Sleep

You may have noticed a long list of “don’t do’s” above! Alongside the don’ts there are positive things that you can do during the day to help sleep.

Exercise

Regular daytime exercise helps your body relax and releases mood enhancing hormones. Think about the best way for you to work towards this.

Relaxation Techniques

There are several types of relaxation techniques which your therapist can discuss with you. There are also many good off the shelf relaxation CD’s.



One technique that is useful to use alongside these techniques is positive mental imagery. Imagery can relax the body and work as a distraction when you are beset with worrying thoughts. A good start for imagery is to imagine yourself in a place where you have been very happy or alternatively imagine your ideal place. This might be an idyllic desert island, beautiful mountain top or peaceful woodland. As you picture yourself there, focus first on the colours that you see, this can include any plants or animals, or the sky. Then switch to what you can hear, then focus on what you can smell, and finally ask yourself what you can feel. Are you standing or lying down? What is the sensation against your skin. Is there a breeze? What is the temperature? Once you have worked through the senses imagine that you are looking down on yourself in this scene. You see that you are very relaxed and peaceful.



These types of techniques take practice. You should try them out before using them in bed. Although it can feel quite unnatural (and therefore not relaxing at soothe the mind and body.

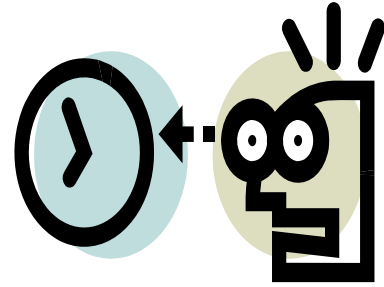
Reducing Worries

Worries have a remarkable ability to develop a life of their own. Comments such as “Don’t worry about it” can be very irritating as most people are already trying hard not to worry! There are more active mental strategies to help counteract worry and these can be used both for worries about sleep and other stressors.

Worry about sleep

In our culture it is often considered the norm to have “a good 8 hours sleep” a night. However, as mentioned above the “norm” is anything between 6-8 hours and waking is part of the normal sleep pattern.

It is more helpful to think of sleep like appetite; some people need to eat more and others need very little food. Both are normal: it depends on the individual.



Other people have an idea that lack of sleep is harmful. Although it is not a good idea to operate machinery or drive when very tired or sleepy, lack of sleep does not impair your ability to do most daily tasks. Parents with babies do suffer from a lack of sleep, but they find that generally they adjust and carry on with life.

So remember:

- *Different people need different amounts of sleep.*
- *You may like to have more sleep than you are getting, but you will not come to harm because you are not getting the amount of sleep you want.*

Other worrying thoughts

When we are anxious we tend to produce negative thoughts, which in turn make us feel more anxious. For example, if you wake in the night and think “Oh no, I’m awake again, I can’t bear it”, you are going to feel even more upset and this will produce even more negative thoughts.

To break this vicious circle you can:

- Learn to challenge negative thoughts
- Learn positive self talk

Challenging negative thoughts

Most thoughts are fast and automatic and you need to learn how to “catch” the negative thought. To identify these thoughts, the next time you feel anxious or upset, stop and ask yourself these questions:

1. What are you thinking right now?
2. What is the worst thing about this problem?
3. What does this event or situation mean to you?

Now ask yourself these questions:

1. What is actually the worst thing that might happen?
2. Is there an alternative explanation?
3. How would someone else think about this situation?
4. What would you say to your best friend in this situation?
5. Are you judging what is happening on the basis of your feelings rather than what is actually happening?
6. Are you catastrophising (letting your thoughts run away with you to imagine the worst possible outcome?)

Positive Self-Talk

Once you have challenged your negative thoughts, you can also learn to replace them with positive self-talk. This is not about just thinking positively, but it is about learning to find ways of talking to yourself that will better help you to cope. Sometimes we do have to cope with unpleasant experiences: preparing how we will do this can help. You might want to think about what statements you can say to yourself to prepare, calm, and strengthen yourself when the negative thoughts pile in.

A final word

Insomnia is a common distressing problem. There is no single solution, but using a combination of the techniques above will help to improve your sleep. Over time, you will find that your sleep pattern changes. This may take many months and so it is important to remind yourself that you will be OK, even if you are tired and you are not getting as much sleep as you want.

SLEEP DIARY

Use the chart below to monitor your average weekly sleep. It is difficult to know the exact time you fall asleep, but most insomniacs are expert clock watchers. Although this is NOT a healthy habit in the long term, when you start checking your sleep pattern it is helpful to look at the clock as you begin to fall sleepy. If you add on another 10 minutes you are probably quite close to your falling asleep time. Some people wake several times in the night. Use the columns to note this down too. If you don't do this, ignore these columns and go straight to the last wake up time, before you get up.

Fill this in each morning, while you can still remember the times.

	Number Daytime Naps	Time to bed	Time asleep	Time awake	Time asleep	Time awake	Time asleep	Time awake	Time got up	Total hours asleep
Monday										
Tuesday										
Wednesday										
Thursday										
Friday										
Saturday										
Sunday										