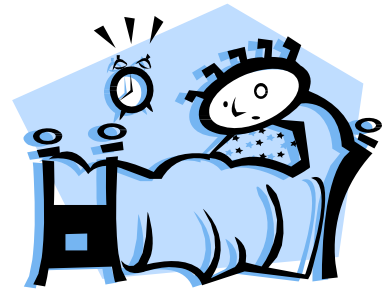


Pain and Sleep

If you have persistent pain and problems sleeping you are not alone. 11% of the adult population have problems with persistent pain and two thirds of these people with pain complain of poor sleep quality. Even amongst the general population 1 in 4 otherwise healthy people suffer with a sleep problem. So this is not a problem that only people with pain face.



Being in pain can have a huge impact on your ability to get a good night's sleep. Sometimes it's the pain that keeps you awake. Sometimes it's the emotional distress about the situation that actually stops you falling asleep. This can lead to:

- Delay in getting to sleep,
- Frequently waking up again once you do get to sleep,
- Decrease in total length of sleep
- Poor sleep quality,
- Not feeling refreshed even if you have slept.

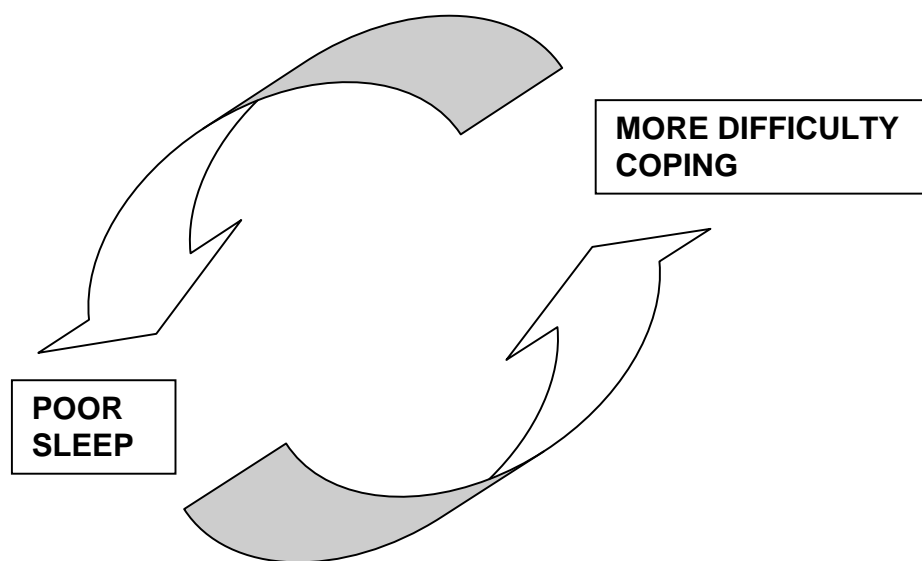
So What Are The Consequences of Sleeping Poorly?

Sleep is essential for psychological well being. Without sleep we can experience:-

- Daytime fatigue and sleepiness,
- Irritable moods
- Loss of motivation to do anything.
- Poor concentration
- Poor memory
- Less ability to cope with everyday difficulties.

What is The Relationship Between Sleep and Pain.

Research certainly shows that having poor sleep is very much associated with having an increased experience of pain*. However, it is not entirely clear if the one actually directly causes the other. It is difficult to disentangle exactly how sleep and pain are related to each other. This is because they are often also linked with other factors such as low mood, inactivity and changes in attention. What is clear is that it's certainly more difficult to cope with pain when you are feeling very tired.



Getting stuck in this unhelpful vicious circle can lead people to become even more inactive and trapped by their pain condition.

*[* In certain conditions such as ankylosing spondylitis people report the opposite have the opposite - worse symptoms with a good night sleep. This is because people with this condition may actually be more stiff if they haven't moved regularly. In this case regular waking can help.]*

Why is it hard to sleep with pain?

Remember that our brains are developed to deal with acute pain. This sort of pain is normally a warning signal to tell you that there is some sort of threat, wound or damage. We have evolved to wake up when we experience pain and get ourselves out of danger. This is not a conscious thing – it's just something our brain does for us. So, when we are in pain the nervous system goes on alert and we tend to become more wakeful. Unfortunately, with chronic pain we still respond in the same way even though there is no ongoing danger.

What else happens to sleep when we are in pain?

When people are in pain the quality of sleep may be reduced because:

- The usual cycles of sleep are broken up and interrupted.
- People in pain have more light sleep (dream sleep) and less deep restorative sleep that normally helps refresh mind and body.
- People in pain also have more frequent brief arousals and more waking brain wave activity than do healthy people. Whilst some researchers have made much of this in terms of trying to understand how it might contribute to particular pain conditions (such as Fibromyalgia), the significance of this is not fully understood – especially as a similar thing occurs in people with other medical conditions.
- There may be overactivity in those parts of the nervous system that govern general arousal levels in the body.

The Handout '*Dealing With Sleep Problems*' Tells You More about Sleep and How To Overcome Its Difficulties.