

# Sleep Hygiene and advice

**Sleep is something we all need, but at times in life lack of sleep can leave us tired, irritated and frustrated. Certainly, not everyone needs the same amount of sleep and even our own needs vary throughout our lifetimes. Whilst lack of sleep can leave you feeling tired it is not dangerous.**

## **Catch up sleep**

You do not have to catch up on all the hours of sleep you feel that you have missed; one good night sleep may catch up for weeks of broken and disturbed sleep.

**Here are some useful tips to help you regulate your sleep cycle:**

**Create a relaxing bedtime routine** - Your body likes regular routines, whether you do or not.

Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends, but don't go to bed until you feel sleepy.

If you find that you are not tired at the same time each night then try making your bedtime later and do something to relax (like reading) until you feel sleepy.

Sleep as much as you need, to feel refreshed and healthy but no more. Excessively long times in bed seems to be related to shallow sleep.

## **Drift off to a 'special place'**

Just lie there with your eyes closed and imagine you're in your favourite, most peaceful place. It may be on a sunny beach, swinging in a hammock in the mountains, or all alone in a cave in the Himalayas. Wherever it is, imagine you are there. You can see your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the fragrance of the flowers, and feel the warmth of the sun or whatever sensations are there. Just relax and enjoy it -- and drift off to sleep.

Once you've found a place that's especially peaceful and effective, you'll find that the more you use it, the more you can count on it to help you relax and get to sleep. Its comfort and familiarity will make it more and more effective

## **Keep your bedroom for sleep only**

Okay, and maybe for one other thing. But not for

- Working
- Watching television
- Listening to radio
- Reading
- Doing crossword puzzles
- Study

Let your mind and body identify bed with sleeping.

## **Try to create a comfortable sleep environment**

**Temperature**—For most people, cool is better than hot.

**Light**—Keep your bedroom as dark as possible. You might even consider wearing an eye mask. Consider blocking the light from illuminated clocks.

**Noise**—Less noise means more sleep. You can reduce noise levels with rugs and drapes, earplugs, background "white" noise (such as a fan), or soothing music. Occasional loud noises disturb sleep, even in people who are not awakened by them, and cannot remember them in the morning.

**Comfort**—A good mattress can improve the quality of sleep

**Sleep on your back** - It's the best position for relaxing, and allows all your internal organs to rest properly. If you must sleep on your side, do it on your right side, not your left. Sleeping on the left side causes your lungs, stomach and liver to press against your heart, causing stress on an organ that most of us find quite useful.

Never sleep on your stomach. It causes pressure on all your internal organs -- including your lungs, which results in shallow breathing. It can also, as you've no doubt discovered, cause a stiff neck and upper back problems.

## **Avoid alcohol and caffeine**

**Alcohol** may help you get to sleep, but it will make your sleep restless and uneasy.

**Caffeine** - contained in tea, cola and chocolate, as well as in coffee - is a stimulant and can cause problems for people trying to fall asleep. Caffeine in the evening disturbs sleep, even in those who feel that it does not.

Don't smoke; **Nicotine**, like caffeine, is a stimulant. It may cause problems with falling asleep, waking up, and nightmares.

## **Watch your diet**

A heavy meal or spicy foods before bedtime can lead to night time discomfort, and fluids may make disruptive trips to the bathroom necessary. A light snack, however, can prevent hunger pangs and help you sleep better.

## **Get out of bed if you're not sleeping**

If you don't fall asleep within 15–30 minutes, get up. Get back into bed only when you feel sleepy. If you can't sleep, go to another room, and do something relaxing. Consider:

- Reading
- Word searches
- Anything you find dull that won't stimulate you!

### Cat - naps

Try to avoid sleep during the day or when you get home from work; Naps can make you feel more tired and make night time sleep more difficult.

### Exercise

Regular exercise has been shown to improve sleep. Exercising in the morning or afternoon—at least 3 hours before bedtime, will help you get a deeper, more restful sleep. A minimum of a daily walk in the fresh air! Occasional exercise does not necessarily improve sleep the following night. Too much activity late in the evening can stimulate your body and make it difficult to relax for sleep.

### Avoid watching the clock

Set the alarm and place the clock out of sight. Constant checking can even *cause* insomnia.

### Physical relaxation and Deep Breathing

Lie on your back.

Initially, tense every muscle in your body so you are like a board.

Then slowly relax your body, starting with your feet and moving up through every part of your body until you have reached - and relaxed - your face and scalp. 'Telling' yourself in your mind, can help you to relax more effectively.

Eye exercises- when lying in bed, look up, then move your eyes slowly in a circle around the periphery of your vision 3 times one way and then 3 times the other.

### Deep Breathing

This is probably one of the best and most effective ways to help sleep and relaxation. Most people only use a fraction of their lungs to breathe. Controlled rate deep breathing can be very soothing and relaxing.

Lying on your back, slowly begin to inhale, first filling your lower tummy, then your stomach area and then your chest and the top of your lungs almost up to your shoulders. Hold for a second or two, then begin to exhale. Empty the very bottom of your lungs first, then the middle, then finally the top.

Continue this breathing for 4 or 5 minutes. Don't force your breathing; it's not a contest to see how much air you can take in. Just do it in a relaxed, peaceful manner.

After a while, imagine that you are floating on a warm, gentle ocean. The sun is shining peacefully on your body. Imagine that you rise on the gentle swells of the water as you inhale and that you slowly descend as you exhale. Continue this relaxing breathing as long as you wish (hopefully until you fall asleep).

### Toe Wiggling

Lie on your back and wiggle your toes up and down 12 times, wiggling the toes of both feet at the same time. This will relax your entire body, inside and out.

Doing this in the morning before getting out of bed can be invigorating and help you feel more energetic.

### 'Sense Blocking'

The method of picturing and counting sheep jumping over a gate can work for some people. This is because it blocks your mind from all the other worries swirling around in your head that may be preventing you from sleeping.

Another method is to forcefully occupy the main senses so they can't stop you sleeping:

#### **Vision**

Whilst deep breathing (as above) and with your eyes closed, picture a number from 1-9 in your vision. As you breathe in, make this number fill your vision, then whilst breathing out picture it floating away, getting smaller. Continue with this on each breath and it will prevent other images entering your mind.

#### **Hearing and speech**

As you picture the number floating away 'say' the number in your head, this will prevent other thoughts and ruminations stopping your sleep.

Other possibilities that you may wish to consider to help with sleep in the longer term include:

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Accupressure
- Acupuncture

### Sleeping tablets

Very occasional use may help sometimes; but used long term can make things worse.

**All** sleeping tablets may cause a **dependance** and are **potentially addictive**.

**Try not to worry too much about not sleeping as this can make sleep even harder!!**