



## How to Sleep Well

This information is a helpful guide if you have a problem with sleeping, use it with the Top Tips. It may take a few weeks to really establish a new sleep pattern so persevere, and if there is no improvement after 4 weeks, seek professional advice, as sleep is an essential part of your wellbeing.



### How much sleep do you need?

The amount of sleep that each adult needs does vary, and is not the same for everyone. Most do require between seven & eight hours during which time the brain is able to carry out essential internal “housekeeping”, sorting & processing the day’s events which also then makes memory storage more efficient.

However, there are some who find they can manage on less than seven hours, and certainly occasional nights with less are manageable. However, a consistent sleep deficit is likely to affect your ability to perform and function at your best.

A sleeping difficulty can also be a sign of underlying medical problems like depression, anxiety and stress that means you should seek professional advice from your GP.

The following guidelines may seem obvious, but sometimes the simple and easy changes can make a big difference, especially if several of them apply to you.

#### Check your Sleeping Environment

- **Use comfortable bedding:**  
Make changes if needed to, mattress, pillows, duvet, blankets
- **Find a comfortable temperature setting for sleeping:**  
If your bedroom is too cold or too hot, it can keep you awake
- **Keep the room well ventilated:**  
A cool (not cold) bedroom is often the most conducive to sleep
- **Minimise any distracting noises and eliminate as much light as possible**
- **Stop using your bed as an office or workroom:**  
Let your body "know" that the bed is associated with sleeping

#### Getting Ready for Bed

- **Try a light snack before bed.** A small easy to digest snack or warm milky drink may help you to sleep
- **Practice relaxation techniques before bed.** Activities such as yoga, deep breathing, meditation and visualization may help relieve anxiety and reduce muscle tension
- **Don't take your worries to bed.** Leave your worries about job, school, daily life, etc., behind when you go to bed. You can download our worksheet to assess your worries from the ISMA website
- **Establish a pre-sleep ritual.** A warm bath or a few minutes of light reading, can help you sleep
- **Get into your favorite sleeping position.** If you don't fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, get up, go into another room, and read until sleepy.

## What is your sleep pattern?

|   |   |            |           |
|---|---|------------|-----------|
| <b>A.</b> I am unable to get to sleep because:                              | My head is buzzing with thoughts plans, worries.                                      | <b>YES</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| <b>B.</b> I get to sleep, but then wake up in the middle of the night with: | My head is full of (mostly negative) thoughts, questions, and trying to find answers. | <b>YES</b> | <b>NO</b> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>A.</b> I am unable to get to sleep - <b>tips to help:</b>   | <b>B.</b> I get to sleep, but then wake up in the middle of the night – <b>tips to help:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accept you have done the best you can for now and will tackle any concerns in a planned way tomorrow</li> <li>▪ Soak in a warm, relaxing bath</li> <li>▪ Add a drop of lavender oil to an oil burner with some water</li> <li>▪ Add a drop of lavender oil to a tissue or handkerchief under your pillow</li> <li>▪ Learn deep abdominal breathing and take three or more long, slow, deep breaths then as you exhale, feel your body relaxing ready for sleep</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Keep a pen and pad beside the bed, as soon as you awake up, write down your waking thought(s) then turn over and go back to sleep telling yourself you can now deal with this in the morning</li> <li>▪ Accept that you have done the best you can right now and that you will deal with the thought in a planned way tomorrow</li> <li>▪ Place the thought in a mental box to be revisited in the morning</li> <li>▪ Return to sleep by initiating some deep abdominal breaths</li> </ul> |

### What to AVOID that may be causing or contributing to your sleep difficulties:

- More than five cups of coffee a day can increase the pulse rate & interfere with sleep patterns, cut down or stop if possible. More than ten cups of tea will have the same effect
- Cola drinks contain large amounts of caffeine also & can interfere with relaxation, as can poor eating habits & very low calorie diets
- Small amounts of alcohol can be relaxing but alcohol can also over stimulate
- Smoking within one hour of bedtime – make a determined effort to give up smoking
- Over-exercising before bedtime – this again is too stimulating & it can be difficult to bring down the adrenalin levels
- If you have a TV in the room, at the appropriate bedtime, the TV should be turned off as it is an engaging, stimulating medium and can preclude sleep

After 3-4 weeks of making any changes, you may find it helpful to reassess your progress. However, if you still have concerns about your sleeping, it is advisable to seek medical advice.

## Top Tips If You Can't Get To Sleep

- **Start to fix a bedtime and an awakening time:** The body "gets used" to falling asleep at a regular time (really important for children). Even if you are retired or not working, this is an essential component of good sleeping habits.
- **Reading a good book:** Light reading (not a thriller) helps many to unwind and relax giving time for you.
- **Try a warm bath:** Not too hot or immediately before you get into bed. Light some candles and indulge yourself, try lavender or jasmine scent that can help to lift tension.
- **Progressive relaxation:** Use slow deep diaphragmatic breathing as you release the tension from your muscles. You can also download the '60 second tranquiliser' free from the ISMA<sup>UK</sup> website: [www.isma.org.uk](http://www.isma.org.uk)
- **Have a well-ventilated room:** A hot stuffy bedroom or one that is too cold will affect your sleep, wear light cotton night clothes.
- **Try a low volume radio:** Some people find this helps them go to sleep, since radio is a less engaging than the visual stimulus of television.
- **Avoid electronic gadgets:** Television, computers, smart phones all stimulate the brain making it harder to relax and drift into a good quality sleep
- **Avoid napping during the day:** Late afternoon for most people is a "sleepy time." If you feel you have to, try to limit the nap to 30-45 minutes, provided you can still sleep well at night
- **Avoid alcohol at least 3-4 hours before bedtime:** While alcohol has an immediate sleep-inducing effect, a few hours later, as the alcohol levels in your blood start to fall, there is then a stimulant or wake-up effect.
- **Avoid caffeine 3-4 hours before bedtime.** This includes caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea and many sodas, as well as chocolate.
- **Keep hydrated:** Approximately 2 litres of water a day is recommended (includes drinks made with water).
- **Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 3-4 hours before bedtime.** These can affect your ability to stay asleep. Eat your last main meal at least 2 hours before bedtime.
- **A light snack before bed:** This can help prevent a low blood sugar if you wake in the night feeling hungry. It needs to be easily digestible like a glass of milk that also contains tryptophan which assists sleep.
- **Exercise regularly, but not right before bed.** Regular exercise, particularly in the afternoon, can help deepen sleep. Strenuous exercise within the 2 hours before bedtime can decrease your ability to fall asleep.

**If you need help to sleep, start by talking to your GP ... today!**