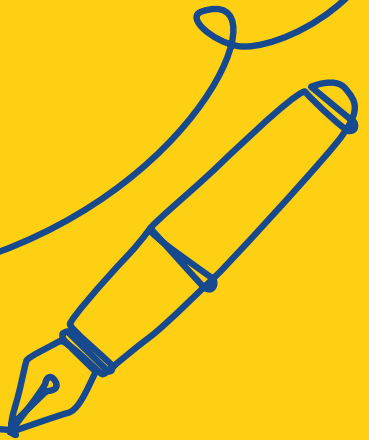


Sleeping better



This booklet is part of our Active Monitoring service. Take your time as you work through it. If you find any exercise uncomfortable, take a break and discuss it with your practitioner.



How sleep can affect you

Stress, anxiety and worry can all contribute to a poor night's sleep. Being tired during the day may result in you functioning less effectively and if sleep problems continue for a long time, this can lead to longer term physical and mental health problems. For example, studies have shown that sleeplessness can contribute to depression, as well as being a symptom of it.

Even if you have had difficulty sleeping for a long time, there are things you can do to help. This booklet gives you some examples of things that might be contributing to the problem, and are best avoided.

This booklet also provides some things that you can do to help you sleep better. Not everything listed in here will work for everyone, so pick a few things to try and see what works best for you.

If you find that your sleep is still not improving, then please discuss this with your practitioner or make an appointment to see your GP.



Things that can make sleep more difficult

The following things can all contribute to sleep problems. Try to cut down on as many as you can.

Caffeine

Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, chocolate and some fizzy drinks, including cola and energy drinks. It is a stimulant which makes you feel more alert and less sleepy. Reducing the amount of caffeine you drink especially in the afternoon or evening, can help to improve your sleep patterns.

You could try decaffeinated tea and coffee, but do remember that it isn't possible to completely remove caffeine so it is best to avoid these drinks altogether close to bedtime. Some people find that naturally caffeine-free herbal or fruit teas are a pleasurable alternative, particularly chamomile which can help you to relax.

We are all affected differently by caffeine. Some people may need to cut it out altogether, whereas others may find that just reducing the amount consumed in the evening can help. Try to cut down slowly, as caffeine withdrawal can result in side effects, including headaches.

Alcohol

Some people find that a drink in the evening helps them to get to sleep more quickly, but alcohol is actually likely to make your sleep problems worse. Alcohol will often make you wake up during the night, and then it can be difficult to get back to sleep. This is because your body is processing the alcohol - it acts on the kidneys so that you need to go to the toilet, and also makes you thirsty so that you need to drink more water.

Tobacco

People who smoke may find that a cigarette relaxes them and relieves tension in the short term. But, like caffeine, tobacco is actually a stimulant that wakes you up. Try to avoid smoking close to bedtime, or if you want to, see your GP about giving up altogether.

Napping during the day

Whilst it can be tempting to catch up on a bad night's sleep during the day, this actually disrupts your body's natural rhythms and is likely to make it harder for you to get to sleep again at night. It is important to try to keep to a regular bedtime and to try to confine sleeping to when you go to bed.

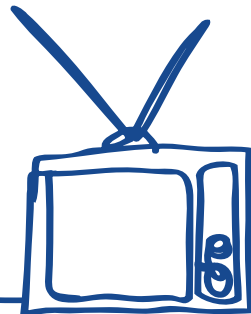
Eating a late main meal

Eating dinner too late at night may mean that you are still digesting your food when you go to bed, which can prevent you from falling asleep. If possible, try to have your main meal before 7pm.

If you get hungry later, have a snack which contains 'tryptophan' – a natural amino acid that helps induce sleep. Nuts and seeds, such as sunflower or pumpkin seeds are all good sources of tryptophan. Foods containing sugar are best avoided, as they increase your energy levels and make getting to sleep harder.

Using technology close to bedtime

There has been a good deal of recent research which shows that using computers, tablets, mobile phones and even watching TV close to bedtime, can result in a restless night. Try to make sure that you turn screens off, including the TV, at least an hour before bed and try to keep technology out of the bedroom.



Things that can help to improve your sleep

Try to do some of the following things to help you sleep better.

Exercise

Being physically active during the day is not only good for your physical and mental health, but it can also help you to sleep better. Of course, we all have different physical abilities and budgets, so choose a form of exercise that suits you, whether it is going for a run, swimming or doing a chair-based fitness regime. Doing gentle exercises before bed, such as stretching or yoga, can help to relieve tension.

Sunlight

Our bodies are naturally programmed to release sleep-inducing hormones (melatonin) when the sun goes down and night falls. Decades ago, when work was mostly outdoors and there was little artificial light, our body clocks were programmed to wake at sunrise and go to sleep when it got dark. By ensuring that you are exposed to sunlight during the day, you will help to stimulate your body's natural sleep hormones and ensure that your brain recognises the difference between night and day.

A regular bedtime routine

Having a regular bedtime and getting up at the same time each morning can help your body clock to establish a pattern. Try to turn off the TV an hour before bedtime and perhaps read a book, have a bath, or listen to some peaceful music to help your mind and body wind down.

Relaxation techniques

On the next page, we have a few relaxation techniques that you can try. These techniques are covered in more detail in our separate relaxation techniques booklet so please ask your practitioner if you'd like a copy.

Using the hour before bed to wind down and relax can be a particularly useful way of helping you get to sleep.

- Breathing slowly and deeply, from the diaphragm (just above the tummy), can help to increase feelings of calm and wellbeing.
- Lying or sitting down, and tightening and then releasing each muscle in turn, can help to get rid of tension that has built up during the day; start with one foot and then the other, and gradually work up to your facial muscles.
- Meditation or mindfulness exercises have become a very popular form of relaxation in recent years. They help your mind to concentrate on a focal point, such as your breathing or your surroundings, and focus less on the stresses and strains of the day.

Prepare your bedroom for a good night's sleep

Having the right environment is important to get to sleep. All of the following are useful things you can do:

- Get your bedroom as dark as possible. You could use black-out fabric for curtains or blinds and ensure LED lights are switched off, or kept as low as possible; if you need to, invest in a good quality sleep mask.
- Try to cut out noise, including loud clocks; if you live in a noisy household or community, you could try earplugs.
- Keep your bedroom free from clutter, computers, television and work - even though the light is off, you still know it is there; if possible, try to keep your bedroom as a calm environment.
- Keep your bedroom cool, but not too cold; open the window a little if it is safe to do so.

Get up if you can't sleep

Finally, if you can't sleep, try to avoid lying awake and worrying. If you stay awake too long, it can make you feel stressed and you may come to associate your bed with a lack of sleep. After 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing, like reading a book. You could even try going to sleep in a different room, if you have one.

Your plan for better sleep

We hope that you've found the suggestions in this booklet helpful. We suggest that you write down four things that you could do to help improve your sleep. Perhaps choose two things from the list of things that make sleep more difficult, and two things from the list of things that help to improve sleep.

My plan for better sleep

1.

2.

3.

4.

If you find that your sleep is still not improving, then please discuss this with your practitioner, or make an appointment to see your GP.

We won't give up until everyone experiencing a mental health problem gets both support and respect.

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