



Improving Sleep for Better Wellbeing



Understanding Sleep

Sleep plays a vital role in our physical health, emotional wellbeing and day-to-day performance.

While occasional sleep difficulties are common and often linked to stress, illness or changes in routine, prolonged sleep problems can have a significant impact on both physical and mental wellbeing.

Why Sleep Matters

Quality sleep helps to:

- Restore and repair the body
- Strengthen the immune system
- Support memory and learning
- Regulate mood and emotions
- Improve concentration and decision-making
- Support energy levels and physical health
- Reduce inflammation within the body

When Sleep Is Poor

Poor sleep can contribute to:

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Low mood
- Poor concentration
- Reduced productivity
- Memory difficulties
- Changes in appetite

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Sleep is one of the most important foundations of wellbeing, resilience and performance.

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How Sleep Works

Most adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night, although individual needs may vary.

Sleep occurs in cycles, with each cycle lasting approximately 90 minutes. Most people experience four to five sleep cycles during a typical night.

Your Body Clock

Your body has a natural internal clock known as your circadian rhythm.

This helps regulate:

- Sleep and wake times
- Energy levels
- Hormone production
- Alertness throughout the day

Exposure to daylight helps regulate your body clock, while bright lights and electronic devices can interfere with your body's natural sleep signals.



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Remember:

Waking briefly during the night is normal.

Many people wake between sleep cycles without realising it. Problems often arise when we become frustrated, anxious or focused on being awake.

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Improving Sleep Quality

Build a Consistent Routine

Your body responds well to consistency.

Try to:

- Go to bed at a similar time each night
- Get up at a similar time each morning
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine
- Allow time to unwind before sleep

Examples include:

- Reading
- Gentle stretching
- Listening to calming music
- Having a warm bath

Create a Sleep-Friendly Environment

Aim for a bedroom that is:

- Cool
- Dark
- Quiet
- Comfortable
- Free from distractions

**A tidy and
relaxing
environment
can help
promote
better sleep.**

Habits That Support Better Sleep

Limit Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant and may affect your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Consider reducing caffeine consumption, particularly during the afternoon and evening.

Be Careful With Alcohol

Although alcohol may initially make you feel sleepy, it can disrupt normal sleep cycles and reduce sleep quality.

Avoid Large Meals Late at Night

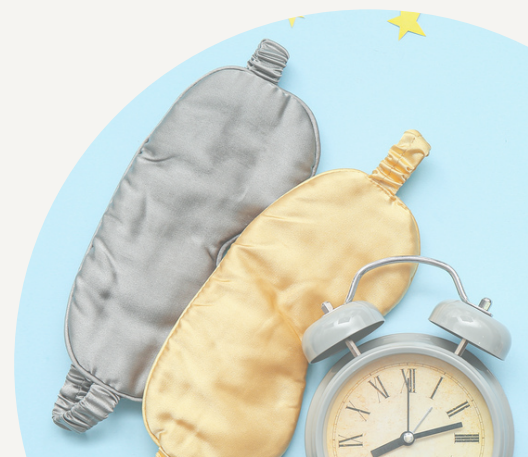
Heavy meals close to bedtime may make it more difficult to fall asleep comfortably.

Stay Active

Regular exercise and time outdoors can help regulate energy levels and support healthy sleep patterns. Exposure to daylight also helps support your natural body clock.

Avoid Long Naps

If you do nap, try to keep naps brief, ideally under 30 minutes. Longer naps may affect sleep later that night.



What To Do When You Can't Sleep

Worrying about sleep often makes it harder to sleep.

Instead of lying awake becoming frustrated, try focusing on calming your mind and body.

Breathing Exercise

Try simple box breathing:

1. Breathe in slowly for 4 seconds
2. Hold for 4 seconds
3. Breathe out for 4 seconds
4. Hold for 4 seconds

Repeat for several minutes.

Breathing exercises can help activate your body's relaxation response.

Cognitive Shuffling

Choose a simple neutral word, such as:
FLOWER

Starting with the first letter, think of neutral items beginning with that letter.

For example:

Fish → Fence → Forest → Fork

Then move to the next letter.

This technique helps redirect attention away from worry and encourage relaxation.

If Sleep Isn't Coming

If you remain awake for 20-30 minutes:

- Get out of bed
- Do something calm and relaxing
- Keep lighting low
- Avoid screens where possible
- Return to bed when you feel sleepy

This helps maintain a strong association between your bed and sleep.

Personal Sleep Plan

What is currently affecting my sleep?

What habits might be making sleep more difficult?

Which sleep strategy would I like to try first?

What helps me relax and unwind?

One thing I will do differently after reading this guide:

Useful Resources

NHS Every Mind Matters

Advice and support for improving sleep.

 www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters

NHS Sleep Information

Practical guidance for sleep difficulties and insomnia.

 www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep

Sleepstation

Evidence-based information and practical sleep advice.

 www.sleepstation.org.uk

The Sleep Charity

Resources, tips and advice for improving sleep.

 www.thesleepcharity.org.uk

NHS Sleepio

A clinically validated digital programme for insomnia and sleep difficulties.

 www.sleepio.com

Need Additional Support?

- Speak to your manager
- Contact HR or Occupational Health
- Access Focus Connect
- Contact your GP
- Self-refer to NHS Talking Therapies



Remember:

Sleep difficulties are common and often improve with small, consistent changes over time. Aim for progress, not perfection. Building healthy sleep habits usually takes practice and repetition.

