

Sleep Leaflet

For patients and carers

While sleeping is crucial to rest and repair our mind and body, it isn't always easy and problems with sleep are common. While a few sleepless nights is usually nothing to worry about, it can become an issue if a lack of sleep starts to affect daily life..

This leaflet has been produced to help you understand sleep, its importance, what you can do to improve it and when to seek help.

Healthy sleep encompasses three major things. One is how much sleep you get, another is sleep quality and the last is a consistent sleep schedule.

What happens when we sleep?

We tend to have four restorative cycles of sleep, each lasting around 90 minutes. Between each cycle we have periods of REM sleep (rapid eye movement - when you dream more). This part is important for memory and cognition consolidation.

Each 90-minute cycle can roughly be divided into two 45-minute sections.

The first half is when the natural circadian rhythm is dipping, and you are getting sleepier and then enter deeper sleep. During the second half you are becoming more alert and the sleep becoming lighter. You are therefore more likely to wake as you come through the second part.

What can affect our sleep

- Certain medicines, such as steroids and diuretics, so we advise taking them in the morning where possible
- Depression and anxiety, although poor sleep also makes these conditions worse, creating a negative cycle
- Times of heightened stress can affect our ability to both fall asleep and stay asleep
- Some conditions can cause cramps (particularly at night at the back of the calf), including vascular disease and liver disease. Trials suggest a teaspoon of juice from a pickle jar help ease cramps
- Some people experience restless legs. It is always worth seeing a doctor to consider if there is a reversible underlying cause, but paracetamol may relieve this
- Some conditions cause an itch which can impact sleep. Speak to your clinical team as treatments are available



- If the liver is not functioning adequately, it can impact sleep. Drugs like lactulose can help this
- Alcohol creates the illusion of helping as people perceive that it enables them to fall asleep, but evidence shows it leads to poorer quality sleep with more fragmentations and repeated waking
- Stoma bags can be active at night. This can be reduced by hydrating early in the day, eating more food earlier in the day and having a light meal in the evening
- Some people struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep due to an overactive mind

General sleep hygiene

- Reverse any reversible issues such as itching or discomfort
- Get natural daylight
- Move more during the day according to what is realistic for you to manage
- Avoid caffeine after 2pm
- As the evening comes, dim the lights
- Avoid devices near bedtime
- Schedule worry time earlier in the day, by writing worries down, so your brain learns to stop worrying at night
- Reduce food and drink near bedtime
- Create a restful relaxing environment
- Have a bedtime routine to condition the brain – try to keep timings the same
- Remember the bed is only for sleep and sex (avoid TV or reading in bed)

When to seek advice

If you have tried changing your sleeping habits, you have been having trouble sleeping for a while or your sleeping problems are affecting your daily life in a way that makes it hard for you to cope, please speak to your GP. Treatments are available for many common sleep disorders. Cognitive behavioural therapy can help with insomnia (look at the Sleepio app), and certain medications can also help some people. Before taking anything for this issue, please consult a medical professional.

Did You know?

Sunlight stimulates the release of serotonin. Near bedtime, as it gets darker, the body converts that serotonin to melatonin – the sleepy hormone - which leads to sleep. So, to sleep well we need to be exposed to light by day and darkness at night.

This is why it is good to get outside. For those whose mobility is limited, opening curtains and sitting by the window is still valuable. Then, at the end of the day, closing curtains, dimming lights and avoid brights lights helps the body to recognise it is bedtime. Having a regular bedtime helps with sleep as you tend to start to feel tired around the same time and you are more likely to fall asleep at the start of that first 45-minute cycle when you are becoming sleepier, taking advantage of the natural sleep state.

There is evidence showing that warm hands, feet and eyes helps to regulate overall body temperature, which helps you to fall asleep. So wearing socks and a warm eye patch or placing a hot water bottle at the feet (not on the stomach), could be beneficial.

When it comes to sleep, some people are owls, and some are larks. Owls tend to go to bed later, fall to sleep later and wake up later. Larks tend to go to bed early and rise early. This may be related to light and natural melatonin levels.

If it takes you less than five minutes to fall asleep at night, you're probably sleep-deprived. Ideally, falling asleep should take ten to fifteen minutes.