



Managing sleep



Why do we sleep:

The first point of improving sleep is understanding **why** we sleep.

- Helps form and maintain pathways in brain used for learning and memory
- Helps concentration and reaction time
- Research suggests that during sleep, toxins are removed that are built up during the day in the brain
- Important for brain functions such as neuron communication
- It affects every tissue and system in the body – including the immune system
- Without it research has shown it can increase risk of high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, depression, and diabetes

Things that can effect sleep:

- Irregular sleep can affect the cycle
 - Alcohol can decrease the quality of sleep and increase the length
 - Health conditions
 - High stress levels
 - Increased caffeine levels
- Age can affect the amount and depth of sleep:
 - Recommended amount of sleep for those aged 6 to 12 years is 9 to 12 hours per 24 hours
 - Recommended amount of sleep for those aged 13 to 18 years is 8 to 10 hours per 24 hours
 - Recommended for adults is 7 or more hours a night

Good sleep:

Sleep can help improve concentration and help restore the body. It also has an effect on the immune system and can help strengthen it. Research suggest that sleep removes toxins from the brain and good quality sleep also promotes growth within the body, regulates emotions and promote physical health and emotional wellbeing which can prepare us for a new day.

Lack of sleep:

Weakens the connection from our prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for our decision making and reactions and the amygdala which is responsible for our emotions. This is why we find it harder to make decisions when we are tired and also have slower reactions. The activity in the amygdala is also increased which is why we can become more tearful and easily irritable leading to higher stress levels.

Ways to help improve sleep:

Sleep can be challenging to change. There are several things that can be put in place to help improve our quality of sleep. Changes may not be automatic but it is important to try a variety of different techniques to improve your quality of sleep.

	Already do	Can improve
Reducing light at night, it may help to keep curtains closed from a set time and using 'night time mode' on electrical equipment or stop watching tv at a certain time before settling into bed. Aim to wind down at least 30-60 mins before going to sleep.		
Reduce caffeine intake in the afternoon. Caffeine can last in our system for at least 6 hours which could reduce the amount of sleep you can get. Switching to Decaffeinated drinks or choosing to not drink caffeine in the afternoon at all can help.		
Temperature of the bedroom, whether it be too cold or too hot can also affect sleep. Aim for a room temperature of about 16-18 degrees is best but keep in mind the seasons.		
Try to eat at least 3 hours before you settle for sleep, the body has to use up more energy when digesting food which slows the process of sleep down. Although you may feel tired after a big meal, try to stay awake until your normal sleep time.		
Making sure you only use your bed for sleep and not using your bedroom to do work in if you are working from home or late at night. You will be less likely to associate your bed with sleep this way		

Other ways to help with sleep:

- Setting a regular time to go to bed and wake up (this will take a while for your circadian rhythm to get used to). If you go to bed, late try bringing your wind down time forward by about 10-20 mins a day until you reach your ideal sleep schedule.
- Making sure you only take a warm bath or shower before bed, hot baths or showers can increase blood flow making you feel wide awake. If you are experiencing soreness in the body, try having a hot bath a few hours before bed.
- Listening to relaxing music, white noise, or podcasts on low to help you drift off. You can also use auto turn off functions on some apps such as Spotify.
- Light stretches or yoga can help loosen up tense areas making you feel more relaxed.
- Mindfulness is also good to help slow down breathing, letting worries come and go so they don't intrude on your sleep.
- If you are struggling to sleep whilst in bed, try getting out and doing a light task such as reading, until you start to feel sleepy.

Sleep plan:

A sleep plan can help you think about starting your sleep hygiene routine by planning ahead to ensure you get a good quality sleep. It can help you consider timing of activities and when to reduce them.

Try and fill out a plan that would be suited to you

Sleep at:

Wake up at:

Personal hygiene at:

Turn off electronics at:

Last meal at:

Stop caffeine intake at: