

## Sleep

1 in 3 people in the UK are regularly affected by sleep problems. You might find that it takes you longer to get to sleep, that you don't sleep as deeply, you don't sleep as long, or you just don't feel refreshed when you wake up.

This guide looks at why good sleep is important and offers advice on how to get a better night's sleep.

### Why is good sleep important?

Sleep is as important as a healthy diet and exercise to both our physical and mental health. Poor sleep can make our feelings of anxiety and stress seem worse. We may not be able to think clearly or make sensible decisions. We can become upset, angry and irritable more easily. This can all have negative effects on our relationships with family, friends and in our workplaces.

In short, good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how we feel mentally and physically, so it's important to get enough.

### Tips on sleeping better

#### Getting your environment right

- Make sure your mattress and pillow are comfortable
- Don't use your bedroom as anything other than a bedroom. It should be the place where you sleep. If you want to watch TV or work, do it in another room.
- If light coming into the bedroom is a problem, make sure you have thick blinds or curtains.
- If noise is a problem, wear ear plugs.

#### During the day

- Try to get up at the same time every day – including weekends. Avoid sleeping in, even if you're not going to get enough sleep.
- Do a little bit of exercise each day. It doesn't have to be much – it could just be half an hour of walking. Don't exercise vigorously shortly before bedtime – it can make it more difficult to sleep because of the production of endorphins. Gentle stretching and breathing exercises can aid relaxation.

- Avoid taking naps – a long nap will simply throw your sleep schedule off and make it much more difficult to sleep later on.

If you're tired during the day, here are some things you can do to avoid falling asleep:

- Try doing a short intense workout
- Make the house lighter by turning on the lights or opening any closed curtains
- Do some preparation for dinner
- Watch a film (a thriller or comedy works best)
- Go outside for a walk
- Watch the news
- Do some laundry or washing up

## When you go to bed

When you're preparing for bed, it's important to avoid the things that make it harder to sleep. This means avoiding tea, coffee, alcohol and big meals less than a couple of hours before you go to bed.

You should also avoid using your phone just before bed. Blue light from electronic devices can make it harder to sleep. You can get a programme which changes the colour of the light on your screen in the evening so that it's less blue, but it's also worth checking if your phone has this option built-in.

The main thing to do before bed is to make time to unwind – so here are some things you can do:

- Have a bath or shower
- Drink a cup of hot chocolate, warm milk, or herbal tea.
- Write in a journal
- Fold and put away clothes
- Make your lunch for the next day
- Pick out the clothes you'll wear the next day

Sometimes, it's hard to get into a relaxed state because you have a lot of things on your mind. If you have specific concerns, try to deal with them before going to bed. Simply talking to someone you trust about your worries can often help. Get some advice from a trusted person who might be able to help you solve the problem.

## What to do if you can't sleep

It's important to build a strong connection between your bed and successful sleep (falling asleep and staying asleep easily).

If you go to bed and find that you cannot get to sleep, or if you wake up during the night and cannot get back to sleep because of worries, **get up and do something relaxing**. Whatever you do, make sure it's in dim light that is quiet and away from the bedroom. Go back to bed once you feel ready to fall asleep.

Here are some ideas for calming activities you can do:

- Write down what's worrying you right now. If your worries are on a piece of paper, you can forget about them for tonight and pick them up again tomorrow.
- Make a shopping list for the week
- Read a magazine or book
- Think about what you want to do on the weekend.
- Organise your photos
- Do a bit of crafting, embroidery or knitting

If you can do so without waking other people up, you could also try decluttering a drawer, a desk or the dining table.

Finally, if you can, avoid looking at the clock or the time on your phone.

## Apps and tools you can use

Here are some tools recommended by the NHS you can use:

- [Pzizz](#) – this is a very popular app which plays you a different “dreamscape” every night to help you go to sleep.
- [NHS Sleep self-assessment](#) – a tool that gives you a “sleep score” and personalised advice on getting a better sleep
- [Sleepio](#) – an online sleep improvement programme that you can access through the NHS in some areas
- [SleepStation](#) – a sleep improvement programme provided by sleep experts that you can access through GP referral or pay for privately

## When should you get professional help?

Try the strategies list above for a few weeks. If things haven't got better, it's time to seek professional support.

Start by booking an appointment with the GP. They will check how long you've had sleep problems for, and whether you've established the good sleep practices listed above.

If you haven't had sleep problems for very long (less than four weeks):

- They might advise you not to drive if you feel sleepy.
- They will only prescribe medication if your sleep problems are having a significant effect on you during the day.
- They will review how things are going after two weeks.

If you've had sleep problems for more than four weeks:

- They might refer you to a specialist for cognitive behavioural therapy, to challenge the thoughts and feelings you're having that stop you going to sleep.
- If your symptoms are severe, they might prescribe a medication for a short period of time.
- If none of this works, you might be referred to a **sleep clinic** or a specialist in sleep medicine.

For the majority of people, the tips we've listed in this guide will help – and you'll soon find yourself with an improved mood and more energy through the day.

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