



B6: Learn about how to improve your sleep

Chronic pain and sleep

Long term conditions and sleep disturbance often go hand in hand, the symptoms of sleep deprivation may include lack of concentration, poor memory, reduced muscle strength, mood changes, increased sensitivity to pain and compromised immunity. Improving the quality and amount of sleep you get should therefore be a priority.

What is normal?

Normally adults get an average of 6 – 9 hours of sleep each night. This varies between individuals and also changes as we get older. Throughout the night the type of sleep we have changes; with periods of lighter and deeper sleep occurring. It is normal for a person to wake about 12 times each night, but we normally drift back to sleep immediately and don't realise we have woken. In pain conditions however, once woken, it can be hard to return quickly to sleep and you then become more aware of your pain/other disturbances.

Difficulty in sleeping is common

It may start:

- Because of not being able to get comfortable on a suitable bed with the correct comfort and support of pillows.

Other factors influencing sleep patterns could be:

- High anxiety levels and worry due to stress.
- Depression or low mood.
- Reading, watching TV or eating late in the day.
- Going to bed when you are not particularly tired.
- Other medical conditions.

SLEEP CHECKLIST

Your space

- A comfortable mattress and pillow are essential. Use extra pillows as and where required.
- Keep the room as dark as possible.
- Have the room at a reasonable temperature, warm but not hot, and have some fresh air circulating. 16 - 18°C is the best temperature for sleep.
- Keep electronic gadgets, e.g. televisions, computers, music systems, alarm clocks, to a minimum, or eliminate entirely. Turn off your mobile 'phone.
- Keep your bedroom as a sanctuary, a place of peace, not stimulation.
- Have a glass of water by the bed; dehydration causes your pulse rate to rise which can disturb you at night.



Your actions

DO

- ✓ Go to bed when tired and try to get up at the same time every day to help your body develop a regular pattern.
- ✓ Have a bedtime routine, so that you have time to wind down.
- ✓ Use earplugs or go into a separate room if your partner snores.
- ✓ Have some exercise during the day (particularly in the afternoon), even a walk around the house.
- ✓ Have a warm (not hot) bath, with a calming essential oil in it to relax your body and mind.
- ✓ Take some nice deep breaths of fresh air before going up to bed.
- ✓ Use a relaxation or visualisation technique to still your mind.
- ✓ Get up. If after 30 minutes you are unable to sleep, go into another room and do something else (but don't get too comfy). Return to bed only when you feel sleepy.
- ✓ Go to bed when you feel sleepy.
- ✓ Have a warm milky drink or camomile tea and sit quietly.

DON'T

- ✗ Have too much stimulus near bedtime, e.g. arguments, disturbing TV programmes or books.
- ✗ Eat a heavy meal (or acidic food) within 2 hours of going to bed.
- ✗ Eat sugary snacks before bedtime.
- ✗ Drink drinks containing caffeine (coffee, chocolate, coca-cola) in the evening. Try Horlicks, Ovaltine, warm milk or Camomile tea.
- ✗ Use alcohol to help sleep – your sleep will be less refreshing.
- ✗ Smoke within 3 hours of bedtime, cigarettes are a stimulant.
- ✗ Sleep during the day for longer than a twenty minute 'cat nap'. (If you have a cup of coffee before a nap it will help you wake after 20 mins when the caffeine kicks in.)
- ✗ Stay in bed longer to catch up on lost sleep
- ✗ Keep looking at the clock
- ✗ Stay in bed if you can't sleep

Your thoughts

- Deal with worries earlier in the evening. Write down problems and throw the list away.
- Plan the next day before settling down to sleep so that your mind is clear.
- Have a pleasant 'day dream' which makes you feel calm and relaxed.

Remember!

- Your best chance for a good night's sleep is to go to bed calm and relaxed
- Worrying about not sleeping will definitely keep you awake!
- Sleep changes throughout our life cycle