

Ten Tips To Help With Poor Sleep

Poor sleep (insomnia) is common. It is often temporary and improves with time. The following are suggestions that may help if you have poor sleep.

Understanding

It may help simply to understand that short periods of waking each night are normal. Also, that worry about poor sleep can itself make things worse.

Body rhythms

Try to get into a routine of wakefulness during the day, and sleepiness at night.

- No matter how tired you are, do not sleep or nap during the day if you have poor sleep at night.
- It is best to go to bed only when sleepy-tired in the late evening.
- Switch the light out as soon as you get into bed.
- Always get up at the same time each day, 7 days a week, however short the time you were asleep. Use an alarm to help with this. Resist the temptation to 'lie-in'.

The body becomes used to rhythms or routines. If you keep to a pattern, you are more likely to sleep well.

The bedroom

The idea is to associate the bedroom as a quiet, relaxing place to sleep.

- It should not be too hot, cold, or noisy.
- Earplugs and eyeshades may be useful if you are sleeping with a snoring or wakeful partner.
- Make sure the bedroom is dark with good curtains to stop early morning sunlight.
- Don't use the bedroom for activities such as work, eating, or television.
- Consider changing your bed if it is old, or not comfortable.

Mood and atmosphere

Try to relax and 'wind down' with a routine before going to bed. For example, a stroll followed by a bath, some reading, and a warm drink (without caffeine) may be relaxing in the late evening. Do not do anything that is mentally demanding within 90 minutes of going to bed. Go to bed when sleepy-tired. Some people find playing soft music is helpful at bedtime. Try a

player with a time switch that turns the music off after about 30 minutes.

Relaxation tapes

These are commonly available. One may help with sleep, particularly if you find anxiety at bedtime is affecting your sleep. However, a relaxation tape may help even if you are not anxious, but find it hard to get off to sleep. Relaxation tapes often take you through deep breathing exercises, and teach you how to relax the muscles.

Exercise

You should not do strenuous exercise near to bedtime. However, mild stretching exercises may help you to relax just before bedtime.

But, some people find the reason they can't sleep is that, although the brain is tired, the body has not been tired enough during the day. If possible, do some exercise each day. Even a walk in the afternoon or early evening is better than nothing. Daytime exercise can help you feel more relaxed and tired at bedtime.

Avoid stimulants

Stimulants can interfere with sleep. In particular, there are three things to avoid.

- Alcohol - many people take an alcoholic drink to help sleep. Alcohol actually causes broken sleep and early morning wakefulness.
- Caffeine - which is in tea, coffee, some soft drinks such as cola, and even chocolate. It is also in some painkiller tablets and other medicines (check the ingredients on the medicine packet). Caffeine is a stimulant and may cause poor sleep.
- Nicotine (from smoking) is a stimulant, and it would help not to smoke.

Food and drink

You should avoid eating large meals before bedtime.

If you cannot get off to sleep

Get up if you find you are unable to sleep after 20-30 minutes. Go into another room, and do something else such as reading or watching TV rather than brooding in bed. Go back to bed when sleepy. You can repeat this as often as necessary until you are asleep.

See a doctor if you feel that illness, depression, or medication is causing poor sleep

Depression is a common cause of poor sleep and can usually be treated. Some prescribed medicines can interfere with sleep. A change in medication may be possible.

Sleeping tablets are not usually the answer for poor sleep. However, a short course is sometimes prescribed if poor sleep is severe.