

TIPS TO HELP YOU IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP



The science bit

There are various biological processes controlling our 24 hour body clock. One of these is the production of melatonin by the pineal gland in the brain (located just behind the eyes). Production is **switched on by darkness** (making us feel sleepy) **and switched off by exposure to light** (making us feel more alert during the day).

So, exposure to light at night can disrupt the sleep/wake cycle (as it reduces melatonin levels), but light from screens (mainly phones/computers, TV to a lesser extent) and some light bulbs seem to be particularly disruptive as they give off a blue light which mimics daylight. Using screens late at night can also over-stimulate our brains, making us feel less sleepy.

Our sleep is divided up into 90 minute cycles during the night and ranges from light to deep sleep and then Rapid Eye Movement Sleep (when we dream). It is normal for all of us to wake up (momentarily) during the lighter phases of sleep.

Whilst most of us can function after 1 or 2 nights of poor sleep, 7 – 8 hours sleep is beneficial for both our mental and physical health. You should consult your GP if you are having ongoing difficulties sleeping as there could be medical causes. The **occasional** use of sleeping tablets can be helpful, but they tend to have side effects and can cause dependence and addiction. They would also not be recommended to new parents due to risks to the baby.

The 'sleep improvement' techniques on the next page are recommended by UK National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). <https://cks.nice.org.uk/insomnia>

Further information

Overcoming Insomnia and Sleep Problems: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques
Paperback (2006) by Colin Espie (Author) and NHS Choices website

<http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/sleep/Pages/sleep-home.aspx>

Sleep Hygiene

- Increase association between sleep and bed - remove distractions such as screens from bedroom if possible.
- Review comfort of bed, mattress, pillows
- Limit noise, light and maintain comfortable(cooler) temperature in bedroom
- Charge mobile phone in another room/consider buying analogue (old fashioned) alarm clock
- Avoid clock watching during the night
- If unable to get to sleep, get up and do something else, such as reading (in dim light)
- Some people find keeping a pen/paper near the bed helpful - to note down any worries or 'To Do' lists so that these thoughts are less intrusive at night.
- Some people find that Mindfulness exercises during the day helps to regulate their sleep
 - Try <https://www.calm.com/>

Routine

- Go to bed and get up at the SAME time every night (this can improve 'sleep efficiency' where most if not all time in bed is spent asleep)
- Go out into natural light EVERY day
- There are times when daytime sleep may be helpful (such as 'catching up' from disrupted nights with a young child or at times of illness), but if you are in the habit of having a regular daytime nap, it could impact on your night time sleep and the nap should be restricted to 20 minutes (which can still be refreshing) if you want to avoid this.
- Limit smoking/ caffeine containing drinks (and liquids in general in the evening if needing to get up to empty bladder (but beware of dehydration!))
- Don't go to bed hungry, but don't have a heavy meal just before going to bed either
- Reduce alcohol 4 hours before bedtime as it can act as a stimulant and disrupt the sleep cycle
- Some physical activity during the day (best time is PM, not too late in evening) will help you sleep
- Wind down routine 30 – 60 mins before going to sleep:
 - dim lights, use warm tone lightbulbs living/sleeping areas; no screens (if watching TV, think about type of programmes, consider putting on sleep mode)
 - de-caffeinated drink, light snack if needed
 - warm bath or shower
 - relaxation exercise <https://slam-iapt.nhs.uk/southwark/welcome-to-southwark-psychological-therapies-service/resources/>
 - reading (without using a screen)/crosswords/Sudoku
 - listening to calming background music/'white noise'
- If you wake up in the early hours, remember that it is normal to wake up at some point in the night. Try to avoid clock watching but if you are unable to get to sleep try getting up for 15 minutes or so and following some of wind down steps listed above, keeping lighting low

If you are registered with a GP in Southwark, and would like further information about our service and how to self refer, please check our website: www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk or call us on 0203 228 2194