Managing Sleep Difficulties

A Self Help Guide
## Managing Sleep Difficulties
### A Self Help Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can this leaflet help me?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do we need sleep?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much sleep do we need?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What things can affect my sleep?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress &amp; anxiety</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression or low mood</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift workers / Night shifts</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other things that can affect the quality of your sleep</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I improve my sleep?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medications to help me sleep</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Thoughts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I find further advice?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other useful related links</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How can this leaflet help me?

Our lives seem to becoming busier and busier and we may find ourselves squeezing more and more into our day. In addition people often have the added pressure of work demands and family commitments to juggle with this already busy lifestyle.

It’s not uncommon, when we experience these pressures, for our sleep patterns to change. For some of us we are able to get to sleep but wake up early or in the middle of the night, and for others we just can’t seem to get to sleep or end up watching the clock tick by hour after hour.

This leaflet has been developed to help you understand more about sleep and how regular life events can affect this. It also gives you some simple but effective ways to manage this.

Throughout this leaflet you will find simple exercises that you can try in your own time which may help you to manage your sleeping patterns and get a better nights rest. You can either photocopy these exercises or use the spaces provided.

We hope you that you find the information in this leaflet helpful. Details on how to access further advice can be found at the end of the leaflet.

Also available in this series are:
- Managing Stress and Pressure, A Self Help Guide
- Managing and Dealing with Anxiety, A Self Help Guide
- Managing Low Mood and Depression, A Self Help Guide
- Improving my Self Esteem, A Self Help Guide

Electronic copies can be accessed from: http://www.devon.gov.uk/wellbeing-stresstraining.htm

or requested via email: stress@devon.gov.uk
Why do we need sleep?

We need to sleep to allow our body to rest and recover from the day to day wear & tear it’s subjected to.

The quality of your sleep directly affects the quality of your waking life, including your mental sharpness, productivity, emotional balance, creativity, physical vitality and even your weight. No other activity delivers so many benefits with so little effort!

There are two types of sleep:
- Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep
- Non-REM sleep.

REM sleep makes up about one 1/5th of our sleep. During REM sleep our muscles are relaxed, but our eyes move rapidly from one side to the other and we sometimes dream in this stage of sleep.

Non-REM Sleep is known as ‘deep sleep’ and can be divided into four stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drowsiness – Stage 1 and REM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleep – Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper Sleep – Stage 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Sleep – Stage 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During an average night most of us will go through these stages several times and even wake up several times but not remember it.

As we get older, the type of sleep we have changes, often sleeping less and lighter which is often more broken and in stages 1 and 2.
How much sleep do we need?

This mainly depends on your age.

- Babies sleep for about 17 hours each day.
- Older children only need 9 or 10 hours each night.
- Most adults need around 8 hours sleep each night.
- Older people need the same amount of sleep, but will often only have one period of deep sleep during the night, usually in the first 3 or 4 hours. After that, they wake more easily. We also tend to dream less as we get older.

There are also differences between people of the same age. Most of us need 8 hours a night, but some (a few) people will get by with only 3 hours a night. The short periods of being awake can feel much longer than they really are. So you can easily feel that you are not sleeping as much as you are (RCPSYCH 2010).

What things can affect my sleep?

The amount of sleep you get can be dependant upon what is going on for you at any given time.

If you have been finding it difficult to sleep for more than a few days, try not to worry about it too much as this can exacerbate the problem.
These are a few examples of the more common causes of disturbed sleep:

**Stress & Anxiety**
Stress and anxiety can be an immense contributing factor to disturbed sleep. If we are feeling stressed or anxious we often go to bed but find we can’t switch off from the thoughts going on in our head, or we get to sleep only to find ourselves waking a few hours later. This is known as ‘early morning waking’.

The causes of stress and anxiety can be wide and varied; and are different for each individual.

Common causes of work related stress include;

- Long working hours
- Unreasonably heavy workload or equally too little work to do
- Racial or sexual harassment
- A perception of feeling under-valued
- Job insecurity
- Lone working or unsocial hours
- Diminishing personal job autonomy and control
- Uncertainty about work expectations
- Inflexible work schedules
- Poor management

**Exercise 1**

If you believe that stress maybe contributing to your disturbed sleep pattern consider trying this tip;

Using the template given on the next page, or just starting with a blank piece of paper, write down all your thoughts or worries that might be making you feel the way you do.

Next, try to prioritise your list and draw up an action plan of how you are going to tackle, or take back some control over, your worries. Try doing this with a friend,
work colleague or partner. It maybe easier to work through your list with someone who isn’t feeling stressed or under pressure.

Having some form of action plan can help you to regain some degree of control over events and thus hopefully reduce your anxiety a little which may help you get a better nights sleep.

If you’re the type of person who goes to bed worrying about forgetting things or you mind ‘won’t switch off’, try using this exercise just before you go to sleep. If you write your worries down, firstly you won’t forget them, because your list will be there in the morning, and secondly you might get a better nights sleep because you don’t have to worry about forgetting things so much.

If you are concerned about any aspect of your health you should go and see your GP who maybe able to offer you further help or support.
**Depression or low mood**

Clinical depression and low mood can greatly affect our sleep patterns. Early morning waking can be a common factor, as can lethargy and not wanting to get out of bed.

If you think you may be depressed make an appointment to see your GP for advice and support.

**Shift workers / Night shifts**

Shift work and working night duties can impact upon our sleep patterns. Our body is generally programmed to be awake in the day and asleep during the night.

This physiology of sleep is controlled by several complicated body systems. You may have heard about ‘circadian rhythms’ which are closely related to the process of falling asleep.

There is a small gland called the ‘pineal gland’ which is tucked between the cerebral hemispheres at the top of the brain stem which is sometimes referred to as the 3rd eye.

It would appear that the pineal gland receives information from the eyes about the existence or absence of light.

When it receives messages that the body is in darkness it releases a hormone know as ‘melatonin’ which has the effect of making the body feel drowsy. For this reason, shift workers or night workers can experience disruption of sleep patterns. Pilots flying between hemispheres or travellers on long flights can feel the effects of this and it’s more commonly known as ‘jetlag’.

A good way to get back to normal is to make sure that you wake up quite early, at the same time every morning - whatever time you fell asleep the night before. Use an alarm clock to help you. Make sure that you don't go to bed again before about 10 pm that night. If you do this for a few nights, you should soon start to fall asleep naturally at the right time.
Other things that can affect the quality of your sleep

These are just a few other things that may affect your sleep which maybe worth thinking about.

- Is the place where you sleep too hot or too cold? Make sure you try to regulate your environment temperature to that which you feel most comfortable in.
- Are there noisy distractions from outside? Try putting some quiet soothing music on by your place of sleep to dampen noise from outside.
- Do your mattress and pillows give you the right support?
- Does your partner snore or are they restless in bed keeping you awake? Try speaking with your partner about it. Does sleeping on their side stop them snoring or is there a medical reason that they should see their GP about?
- Irregular bed time. Try to go to bed at the same time every night and get into a routine, the same getting up in the morning.
- Eating late before going to bed. Try to avoid eating late or near your bedtime. Going to sleep on a full stomach can make you feel bloated and uncomfortable and is not helpful for the body in digesting the food.
- Caffeine intake can disturb your sleep. Try to avoid drinking lots of tea, coffee and drinking chocolate in the evenings. Switch to a glass of warm milk or a malted type of drink like Horlicks or Ovaltine.
- Children or babies can disturb your sleep. If possible, try to share looking after the children / babies at night, possibly one week each at a time.
How can I improve my sleep?

In this section you can find a list of suggestions that you might like to try as a way of improving your sleep. You do not need to do all of them, just select a few and see how you get on.

- Get into a regular bedtime routine and begin to wind down an hour or two before you are planning on going to bed.
- Try to avoid drinking coffee & tea after dinner. Caffeine can stay in the body up to 6 hours after taken and can act as a stimulant keeping you awake. Try a malted drink or warm milk. Note that drinking chocolate and similar drinks often contain caffeine.
- Take some exercise during the day. Try walking for 30 minutes at a brisk pace, but not to the point of being out of breath. Seek advice from your GP or local Health Sports Centre for guidance on exercise.
- Avoid exercising 2 hours before going to sleep as this will activate your body, making it harder to get off to sleep.
- Wind down for about 2 hours before going to bed and avoid watching action packed, or horror, movies before bed.
- Check your sleep environment is comfortable and as you like it, not too hot or cold, light or dark.
- Turn your alarm clock around so you don’t end up watching time tick by and feeling you cannot get to sleep.
- If you can’t get to sleep in 30 minutes, get up and read a book or watch some boring TV until you feel sleepy again and then go back to bed.
- Avoid eating a heavy meal 2 hours before going to sleep because this can make it more difficult to sleep.
- Avoid using alcohol to help you sleep. It may make you feel sleepy, but you’re likely to need the toilet more often in the night disturbing your sleep and it also poses a risk of developing a dependency.
- Keep a ‘To-Do-List’ by your bed and get into the habit of writing down your thoughts about what’s on your mind. You’re more likely
to get a better nights sleep if you’re less anxious or worried about forgetting to do something.

Have a warm relaxing bath before going to bed and add some lavender oil to help you relax.

Try using relaxation techniques or listen to a relaxation CD before bed. Using a controlled deep breathing technique can also help to relax you before going to bed (example in appendix)

Medications to help with sleep

If your sleep has been disturbed for some time for whatever reason you may need to see your GP for further advice and support.

Your GP may offer you some medications to help ‘reset’ your sleep pattern. Most of these medications are only for short term use i.e. just for one week and you should not try to rely on them for long term use unless advised otherwise by your GP.

Some medications can also leave you with unwanted side effects such as feeling drowsy and sluggish the next day. You should take advice from your GP about your fitness to drive or operate machinery if this is the case.
Final Thoughts

Having a good nights sleep can help us to feel refreshed and alert the following day, however, a poor nights sleep can leave us feeling tired, sluggish and often with poor attention and concentration.

At some point in our lives most of us will experience a period of disturbed sleep for so many different reasons. When you experience those periods, try not to worry too much, it maybe a natural reaction to what’s going on in your life. Just follow some of the basic tips in this handout and hopefully you will be able to get back into a regular sleep pattern again.

If you do have any serious concerns about your sleep, or lack of it, make an appointment to see your GP who maybe able to offer further advice and support.
Where can I find further advice?

You can contact Devon County Council’s Stress Management Service for further advice, or use any of the following internal and external links from a computer.

**Stress Management Service**
Wellbeing@Work Centre
Falcon Road
Sowton Industrial Estate
Exeter
EX2 7LB

Tel. 01392 38 (4808)
Mob. 07979 824 797
Email. stress@devon.gov.uk

1. **DCC INTERNAL LINKS**

   - Wellbeing@Work service: [http://www.devon.gov.uk/wellbeingatwork.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/wellbeingatwork.htm)
   - OH2 referral to Wellbeing@Work form: [http://www.devon.gov.uk/oh2referral.doc](http://www.devon.gov.uk/oh2referral.doc)
   - An Active Day at Work: [http://staff.devon.gov.uk/ppactivedayatwork](http://staff.devon.gov.uk/ppactivedayatwork)
2. OTHER USEFUL SELF HELP RELATED LINKS

- Mindful employer: [http://www.mindfulemployer.net/index.html](http://www.mindfulemployer.net/index.html)
- Patient UK (advice and leaflets on health) [http://www.patient.co.uk/](http://www.patient.co.uk/)
- Healthy Eating: [http://staff.devon.gov.uk/pphealthyeatingfactsheets-3](http://staff.devon.gov.uk/pphealthyeatingfactsheets-3)
- National Debt Health: [http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/)
- British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association Helps snorers and their sleeping partners worldwide.
- National Sleep Foundation American website with information on sleep and sleep disorders
- Narcolepsy Association UK (UKAN) Tel: 0845 450 0394; email:info@narcolepsy.org.uk Promotes the interests of people with narcolepsy and encourages better understanding of the illness.

**REFERENCES**

- [http://www.helpguide.org/life/sleeping.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/life/sleeping.htm)