

## TIME FOR SLEEP

If you are struggling with getting a good nights sleep then consider some of the ideas below. You can talk through the list with a counsellor. Try to keep to the ideas that work for you until you get in to a healthy routine and you recover from sleep deficit. Unless you have a sleep disorder (see your GP if you are concerned) then you should recover quickly from any sleep deficit.

1. Exercise - walk during the day - Not in the evening before going to bed. But do exercise.
2. Stay in one position in bed. Tossing and turning acts as a signal to the body that you're ready to get up. Learn and do muscle tensing relaxation exercises.
3. Do not go to bed until you're really sleepy. If you are suffering 'severe' insomnia then seek advice from your GP. There is the 6 hours in the bedroom technique which helps you to break the insomnia pattern.
4. Sleep inducing herbal tea (i.e. Sleepy Time Tea or Chamomile Tea). Also there is some evidence that the smell of lavender can help. Ask in a health food shop.
5. Warm milk with one or two teaspoons of honey. Warm milk contains tryptophan. Tryptophan is an essential amino acid. The advantage of a tryptophan induced sleep is that you awaken at the normal time everyday and do not feel sleepy or drugged.
6. Have a regular going to bed **routine**. Go to bed at the same time each night. Use standard sleep-inducing tricks at bedtime, including:
  - ❑ A wind-down routine
  - ❑ a warm bath about an hour before bed – it is the drop in temperature that tells your body it is time to sleep
  - ❑ reading
  - ❑ soothing music
  - ❑ a back rub
  - ❑ meditation and relaxation techniques
  - ❑ warm milk
  - ❑ a good novel (or not so good)
7. Have an active day. Get up at the same time each day. Stay busy.
8. Do not nap during the day
9. Get to know your body rhythms of the day. When you are feeling low in energy – mid morning and after lunch – take 10 minutes relaxation break.
10. Try to eliminate the stress and anxiety that may be keeping you awake – talk to a counsellor, mentor or supervisor.

11. Be sure your bedroom where you sleep are conducive to sleep. That means the room should be:
  - ❑ Dark, neither too hot nor too cold, quiet
  - ❑ Clean (relatively dust free)
  - ❑ Tidy (does not have a lot of unfinished business)
12. Late in the day avoid foods that tend to give you indigestion. Avoid a heavy meal before you turn in. Carbohydrate meals tend to make you feel more sleepy than high protein meals.
13. Avoid caffeine, at least from early afternoon on; its effects may not strike until 8 hours or more after it enters your system. No tea, coffee, chocolate or coke.
14. Avoid Alcohol as this may put you to sleep but it disrupts sleep and you are likely to wake up in the middle of the night.
15. Before bedtime, avoid things that tend to stimulate you: loud music or entertainment, TV thrillers, animated or angry discussions and strenuous physical exercise.
16. Do not use your mobile phone before sleep as this stimulates areas in the brain connected with stress.
17. Comfort yourself with the thought that if you're in bed with your eyes closed, even if you're awake you're getting rest.
18. Don't just lie there. If you are very restless and sleep doesn't come in 15 – 25 minutes get up and do something else.
  - ❑ Do not use a bright light.
  - ❑ Write down your worries/concerns
  - ❑ Write down to-do lists - what ever comes into your head put it on paper
  - ❑ Read a novel
  - ❑ Don't get comfortable somewhere else in the house and drop off to sleep
  - ❑ Go back to bed when you feel sleepy
19. Reconsider your sleep needs - they vary significantly from person to person.
20. Make a To-Do-List an hour or so before bed. This will allow you to rest rather than worry about what you forgot or what you need to do tomorrow.
21. Try to ensure that the bedroom is a haven of 'peace and tranquility':
  - Don't argue in your bedroom
  - Associate pleasant thoughts with being in bed
  - Do not work in bed
22. Do not use your mobile phone for long periods of time before you go to bed.

23. Learn and use relaxation techniques throughout the day and when you get into bed. For example, muscle tensing and relaxing exercises; focus on your breathing; pleasant imagery. Counting sheep may sound strange but thinking about something positive and that also requires tedious calculations can be helpful, for example, plan a holiday and think about all the packing – what you would pack, how much it is going to cost – and all in minute detail.
24. \*\* Remember that no matter how disruptive this temporary sleeplessness is, nobody has ever died of lack of sleep (but people die everyday from resorting to pills/alcohol to put them to sleep).

This material is taken from a range of sources including:  
Dement, W.C. & Vaughan, C. (2000), The Promise of Sleep: The Scientific connection Between Health, Happiness, and a Good Night's Sleep, London, Macmillan.

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/hu/groups/sleep/insomnia.htm>

Mike Lawley November 2009