

Counselling and Well-Being Service

Sleep Guide

The Importance of sleep

Sleep is essential to support development. Well rested young people are more able to meet their full potential in every aspect of their lives.

Listed below are just a few of the symptoms of sleep deprivation in children and young people:

- Growth or hormone issues
- Concentration difficulties
- Mental health issues, e.g., depression
- Lowering of the immune system
- Hyperactivity
- Weight gain
- Behavioural issues
- Difficulty remembering things
- Harder to make decisions
- You worry more and more about not getting enough sleep

Did you know?

Melatonin is a hormone which controls the sleep/wake cycle.

It is not produced when there is bright light such as sunlight or artificial indoor lights. This makes it much harder to sleep as your body thinks it's time to get up.

The light emitted by devices and blue screens, like tablets and smartphones also impacts the production of melatonin so it makes it harder to fall or stay asleep.

What happens when we sleep?

- The biological clock runs in sleep/wake cycles and works by tweaking certain hormone levels in our bodies.
- When our mental and physical function start to slip each day, the biological clock starts to wind down adrenaline levels, a naturally occurring stimulant. Ultimately, this persuades us that it's time to head for bed.
- Once we're asleep, the body can then carry out essential repair work.
- Growth hormones become more active during our horizontal hours, while the brain and eyes get the protein they need to function properly.
- As we come out of the sleep cycle, adrenaline kicks in again, speeding up body function and ultimately waking us.

On average teens need 9 - 9.5 hours each night. Are you getting enough?

Things to do to help improve sleep

- Go to bed at the same time: Establish a routine. Hit the sack when you feel tired at the end of each day, so your body clock doesn't have to work hard at getting you to stop.
- Get up at the same time: Try and get some daylight early. This will help stop the hormone melatonin's production.
- Get into shape: Regular workouts reduce sleep-stopping adrenaline. It also drinks up excess energy that could leave you with your sheets in a tangle. Try not to exercise any later than early evening though.

- Eat sensibly: Avoid eating last thing at night or going to bed hungry. If you're stuffed or starving, your stomach won't let you rest.
- Avoid Caffeine: try and reduce in the afternoon and none in the evening.
- Relax before bedtime: Herbal teas, relaxation exercises or hot baths.
- Avoid screens: for an hour before bed.
- Have the right temperature in your bedroom, not too hot or cold.
- If something is troubling you and there is nothing you can do about it right away, try writing it down before going to bed and then tell yourself to deal with it tomorrow.
- If you can't sleep, get up and do something relaxing. Read, watch television, or listen to quiet music. After a while, you should feel tired enough to go to bed again.

Resources to help

Using your phone. Although in general it is not recommended to use your phone before trying to get to sleep there are things available on it that can be useful.

1. Do not disturb mode – putting this on will reduce the notifications you receive at night. It can also change the brightness.
2. Music – can be relaxing to play while you are going to sleep. Most phones have a timer function where it can be switched off after a certain amount of time. Remember to play it at low volume and select a playlist that has soothing music.
3. Podcasts – there are a few podcasts where a soothing voice talks. This can be very relaxing for some people. Again, like with music the timer function can be used to turn this off. An example is called "Sleepy" but there are always new ones being launched.
4. YouTube – there are a lot of sleep and relaxation channels with music or meditations to help you get off to sleep. Playing these at low volume with the phone on a bedside table can be useful. Some to start with are "The Honest Guys" and "Michael Sealey". Try some of their shorter videos that run for 15 – 30 minutes.

Resources to help

There are several free apps available to help with sleep and new ones can be launched any time. Most of these only have a certain amount of content free with the rest paid. You may have to register some details with them to access the content. For this reason, you may prefer the podcasts or YouTube.

Currently one of the best for free content is called InsightTimer. This includes music, meditations, and sleep stories.

If you want to look into your sleep issues in more detail as you are trying all the above and still having problems there is a workbook available at <https://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/SleepProblems.asp> that can give you more things to explore.

Remember that you can also discuss concerns with your GP. There can be some medical conditions that leave us tired and less well rested so if you are trying lots of things that are not working go to your GP.