

## Top Tips for Improving Sleep

### Establish a Sleep Routine

Keeping a regular sleep/wake schedule is crucial to getting a good night's sleep. Wake up at the same time each day – even try to stick close to this time on weekends and holidays. And although the prospect of an afternoon nap can be tempting, try to avoid this as it can disrupt your sleep later on. Getting out of bed at the same time each day will help synchronise your body clock, and your body will soon become accustomed to your new sleep pattern. Natural sunlight in the morning will also help to reset your body clock.

### Remember What Your Bed Is For

Some of us use our beds for many purposes – our bed can be everything from a study, a wardrobe, or a place to watch TV. It might be convenient, but using your bed for multiple purposes can confuse your brain when you want to switch off and fall asleep. For a better night's sleep, make sure your bed is only used for sleep and sex, and only sleep when you're in your bed. Stricter boundaries around what you do in your bed will help your brain create a strong association between bed and sleep.

### Establish Healthy Sleep Habits

There are many healthy habits that you can establish to help you sleep. Get regular exercise each day – there is evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep – although avoid exercising right before bedtime because exercise can stimulate the body and make it difficult to fall asleep. Stimulating substances such as nicotine and caffeine can also cause sleeplessness so avoid nicotine a couple of hours before bedtime and avoid caffeinated drinks in the late afternoon and evening. Coffee and tea are the obvious caffeinated drinks, but don't forget that many soft drinks and energy drinks also contain caffeine. Alcohol can limit your capacity to get a restful sleep too so avoid consuming any in the hours before bed.

### Modify Your Expectations

The more you worry about the fact that you're not asleep the more agitated you'll feel and the harder it will be for you to relax and fall asleep. Modify your expectations about how much sleep you need. Not getting as much sleep as usual won't physically harm you. You may feel tired the next day, but you can trust that your body will ensure you get enough sleep to function properly. When you're lying awake in bed, try not to stew on the fact that you're not asleep - change your perspective – get comfortable and enjoy the quiet.

## Sleep Problems

**The amount of sleep someone needs varies from person to person. Most people need between 7 to 8½ hours sleep, but some people function well on less sleep than this, and others need more than the recommended 8.5 hours sleep per night.**

**How can you tell if you're getting enough sleep? Signs you need more sleep are:**

- Fatigue or daytime sleepiness
- Low energy levels
- Irritability
- Concentration problems
- Impaired memory
- Uncharacteristic clumsiness
- Low mood or anxiety

**Sometimes it can feel like no matter what you do, sleep just won't work in your favour – either you can't get to sleep or you have the opposite problem and fall asleep without too much trouble but wake in the early hours of the morning and struggle to return to sleep.**

**A good night's sleep isn't as impossible as it seems and there's a lot you can do to improve your sleep. Mostly it's about good sleep hygiene – just as we need to be in the habit of regularly brushing our teeth, we also need to implement a nightly routine of healthy sleep habits.**

**The strategies covered in this tips sheet can help to improve your sleep. If your sleep problems persist speak to your GP about a referral to a clinical psychologist.**