

Getting a good nights sleep

FACTSHEET

WHAT HAPPENS DURING SLEEP

Sleep allows our bodies and minds to rest, repair and restore. We probably take it for granted, but when we sleep we pass through different stages:

REM SLEEP (Stage 1)

PRE-SLEEP (Stage 2)

LIGHT SLEEP (Stage 3)

SLOW WAVE / DEEP SLEEP (Stage 4)

RAPID EYE MOVEMENT (REM) SLEEP (STAGE 1)

This is a stage of sleep that we enter in and out of through the night, and makes up about one fifth of our nights sleep. During this stage the brain is active, our eyes move quickly from side to side, and we dream. However, our muscles remain relaxed.

NON-REM SLEEP

In this stage of sleep, the brain rests, but the body moves around. Hormones are released into the bloodstream, and the body carries out essential repair work.

There are three different stages of non-REM sleep:

Pre-Sleep (Stage 2) The muscles relax, the heart beats slower, body temperature falls.

Light Sleep (Stage 3) You can wake up easily without feeling confused.

Slow Wave Sleep or Deep Sleep (Stage 4) Blood pressure falls, in this stage you may sleep talk or walk. It is hard to wake up, and if you are woken you may feel confused.

You will move between REM and non-REM sleep approximately 5 times each night, and will dream more towards the morning. On a normal night, most people will wake up for one to two minutes every few hours, these are known as “mini-wakes”. You are often not aware of these, but are more likely to remember them if you feel anxious, or if other things are happening, such as noise outside, or a partner snoring.

TYPES OF SLEEP PROBLEMS

Sleep problems vary. Often people can have one kind of difficulty or a number of different problems with their sleep. Problems include:

Finding it difficult to get to sleep

Sleeping lightly

Waking early in the morning and finding it difficult to get back to sleep

Sleeping in the day

Sleeping too much

Waking repeatedly through the night

Waking at the same time every night

SLEEP: SOME MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTHS

There are many myths about sleep which many of us believe. When we are having problems with our sleep these myths can cause more worry about our sleep patterns.

We need 7 - 8 hours of sleep every night.

If you don't have enough sleep you will not be able to function the next day.

Waking in the night will make you feel tired all day.

You should make up for lost sleep by sleeping in the day.

FACTS

The amount of sleep we need depends on a range of factors

OUR AGE – As babies we need a lot of sleep (up to 16-17 hours a day), as children we need less (11-9 hours) and then less again as teenagers (8-9 hours). By aged 30 years we may need less than 8 hours and many people aged 70 years and over have less than 6 hours of sleep per night. Older people may find that they are more likely to wake up or be disturbed in the night. This is because our deep sleep decreases as we get older.

HOW MUCH ACTIVITY WE DO – If we are active throughout the day we may need more sleep than someone who is relatively inactive.

OUR HEALTH – When we are unwell we may require slightly more sleep than usual to help us get better.

ALCOHOL AND SLEEP – Even a couple of drinks can interfere with the normal sleep process. When you drink alcohol close to bedtime, you can go straight into deep sleep, missing out on the usual first stage of sleep, called rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. In the course of a night you usually have six to seven cycles of REM sleep, which leaves you feeling refreshed. However, if you've been drinking you'll typically have only one to two cycles, meaning you can wake feeling exhausted. When you drink more than usual, you may have to get up in the night to go to the toilet. And it's not just the liquid you've drunk that you'll be getting rid of. Alcohol is a diuretic, which means it encourages the body to lose extra fluid through sweat too, making you dehydrated. Drinking can also make you snore loudly. It relaxes the muscles in your body, which means the tissue in your throat, mouth and nose can stop air flowing smoothly, and is more likely to vibrate.⁽¹⁾

The amount we sleep changes throughout our life and people tend to need less sleep as they get older. Some sleep problems, for example 'lighter' or 'broken' sleep are normal changes as we age.

TIPS FOR A BETTER NIGHTS SLEEP

AVOID CHORES	Work or exercise near to bed time as this will keep you stimulated and you do not have the chance to wind down.
AVOID CAFFEINATED DRINKS	Avoid tea, coffee and coca cola in the afternoons and evenings.
DO NOT SMOKE A CIGARETTE LAST THING AT NIGHT	Both nicotine and caffeine are stimulants which will keep you awake.
AVOID ALCOHOL	Drinking alcohol, even moderate amounts may make you fall asleep quicker, but it can reduce the quality of your sleep. It can make you need the toilet and also dehydrates you. Using alcohol to improve sleep can become habit forming and lead to alcohol problems.
DON'T EAT MEALS JUST BEFORE BED	This wakes up the digestive system just as you want your body to wind down.
DON'T DRINK LOTS OF WATER OR SOFT DRINKS DURING THE EVENING	A full bladder will wake you up to go to the toilet and disrupt sleep – limit your intake of fluids for two hours prior to bed.
SLEEP IN COMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS	Make sure your room temperature is between 16-20 C and ensure you have low lighting or darkness.
AVOID WATCHING TV IN BED	TV and other electronic devices are stimulating and can keep you awake when tired. If you do fall asleep with the TV on it can wake you up and disrupt your sleep again.
ESTABLISH A WIND-DOWN NIGHT ROUTINE	Draw a bath, have some hot milk, read a book.

REFERENCE

(1) www.drinkaware.co.uk