

# Patient Information Leaflet

## Sleep



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## **Why is Sleep Important?**

Sleep is like food for the brain. During sleep important repairs to body and mind occur. If you do not have enough sleep you can feel irritable, angry or depressed, perform poorly in activities and even look very tired. Feeling tired can make it hard to get along with family and friends and concentrate at school, not just in class but on the sports field too.

## **How Much Sleep do I need?**

In many ways it is not so much about how much you sleep, it is more important that you feel well physically and mentally as a result of your sleep pattern. However, as a guide, it has been suggested that people of your age may need between 8.5 and 9.5 hours per night. This may be more than mum and dad need, this is because your body is growing very quickly.

## **Why Can't I Sleep?**

There can be many causes of sleep problems. Sleep problems can be caused by emotional factors, lifestyle factors, environmental factors, physical factors/illness or occasionally by a sleep disorder.

### **Emotional Causes might include:**

- Stress
- Worry
- Anxiety
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Anger

## **Lifestyle causes might include:**

- Drinking tea/coffee/caffeinated drinks
- Eating just before bed
- Going to bed on a very full stomach
- Strenuous physical activity before going to sleep
- Too much mental activity before sleep
- Too little exercise during the day
- Daytime naps
- Not having regular times for going to bed and waking up
- Too much screen time before bed

## **Possible environmental causes:**

- Noisy sleeping environment
- Too much light in sleeping environment

## **Physical health conditions:**

If you have a physical health condition/problem this may have an effect on your sleep quality. If you do have a long-term health condition, you might want to discuss them with a health worker. There may be better ways to manage the symptoms of long-term conditions so they are less disruptive to your sleep.

## **Sleep Disorders:**

A few people have sleep disorders, although these are not very common. If you feel you have a healthy sleep routine but experience any of the following you may want to contact your doctor for further advice.

- Loud and disruptive snoring

- Sudden attacks of irresistible sleepiness during the day meaning you cannot stay awake
- Uncomfortable feelings in your legs/feet before falling asleep

### **Why Screen Time Before Bed Might be Disrupting Your Sleep:**

Many people like to watch TV, use computers, iPads or smartphones just before they go to sleep and often whilst they are in bed. However, lots of research suggests that using screen devices just before you go to bed can make it more difficult for you to sleep well. It is suggested that this is for 3 reasons:



1. These devices produce lots of light and are often held very close to your face. This light slows down

the production of melatonin, which is a hormone in your body that helps you feel sleepy.

2. These devices are fun and interesting; they stimulate the brain, making you feel more awake and alert.
3. By using these devices in bed, you will start to associate your bed with being awake, working, socialising or being entertained rather than sleeping. When your brain starts to associate your bed with being awake it becomes much more difficult to get to sleep.

## **14 Tips for Healthy Sleep:**

1. Establish a regular sleep and waking time. It is very important to try and go to sleep and wake up at a similar time each day. Although it is tempting, you should try not to vary your sleep and waking times by more than an hour even at weekends.
2. Make sure you are comfortable: being too hot or too cold, hungry or in pain can prevent you from relaxing and falling asleep. If you are hungry try having some warm milk to drink.
3. Avoid eating large meals late in the evening.
4. Noise during the night is a common source of sleep disturbance. If where you sleep is a little noisy try

shutting out the sound by closing windows or doors or wearing earplugs.

5. A light room will make sleeping more difficult. Make sure your room is as dark as possible. Try using blackout blinds or curtains.
6. Try to avoid using screen devices in bed and try not to use them in the last half hour before you go to sleep.
7. Allow wind-down time before sleep. Make sure you stop doing homework at least 30 minutes before going to bed and do something quiet and non-stressful such as reading or listening to music.



8. Use your bed only for sleeping. If you eat, work, watch TV or read in bed, your bed will become associated with wakefulness rather than drowsiness and sleep. It may be useful to remove objects from your room that are associated with being awake.
9. If you are having trouble falling asleep, do not stay in bed. Only go to bed when you are sleepy. If you do not fall asleep in 20-30 minutes, get out of bed

and do a calming activity like reading or listening to relaxing music through headphones. Stay up until sleepy and only then return to your bed. If you return to your bed and still cannot sleep, repeat the process. Do this as many times as is necessary to fall asleep.

10. Avoid caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee and coke after lunch. Even hot chocolate contains some caffeine so try not to drink this in the evening!
11. Get into bright light, preferably natural daylight as soon as possible in the morning and avoid this before going to sleep. The light helps signal to the brain when to wake up and when to prepare for sleep.
12. Avoid vigorous exercise in the 3 hours before you go to bed. This can make the brain and body feel too awake to sleep.
13. If you feel too stressed or worried to go to sleep, try getting out of bed, writing the worry down and then writing 3 steps which you can take to solve the problem that is the source of the stress/worry.
14. Never make an 'effort' to fall asleep. Thinking 'I must get to sleep now' will produce anxiety not sleep. If anxious, try using some of relaxation techniques listed below.

## **Relaxation Techniques To Help You Sleep:**

1. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Start at the toes and work up through the legs, stomach, chest, arms, hands, shoulders, neck and head. Tense each muscle group and hold for five to ten seconds, and then relax. Finally, tense the whole body and hold for 5-10seconds, then relax and feel the body slowly relax and sink into the pillow. This can be repeated more than once.
2. **Guided imagery:** choose a calming and meaningful memory/place. It could be a warm beach scene, a walk through the woods or a cozy rainy day. Imagine every detail of this scene: what does this place smell like, feel like, and look like?
3. It may surprise you that your breathing changes when you are anxious, it becomes quick and shallow. You can even make yourself feel anxious by breathing in this way when you are not anxious! Learning how to purposefully slow breathing down helps increase calmness and relaxation. Breathe in through your nose for 3-4 seconds, and out through your mouth for 6-8 seconds. The slower the better! Controlled breathing should be done for at least 5 minutes.



**Remember...a healthy sleep routine keeps you healthy and happy! 😊**

For more information about healthy sleeping please contact:

This hand-out was produced by the Paediatric Clinical Psychology Team.

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other formats and languages.**

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