

# Helpful habits for sleep



## Workbook

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## Welcome

Welcome to the helpful habits for sleep Workbook. This resource is for anyone who wants to better understand and improve their sleep experience.

This workbook is one of a series that has been co-produced by people who have lived experience and professional expertise of sleep problems. Therefore, we truly understand how difficult it can be to get a good night's sleep! Apparently, poor sleep is a common issue, with over a third of us getting by on less than six hours of sleep per night and more than one in ten of us sleeping for less than five hours per night (Great British Bedtime Report, 2017).

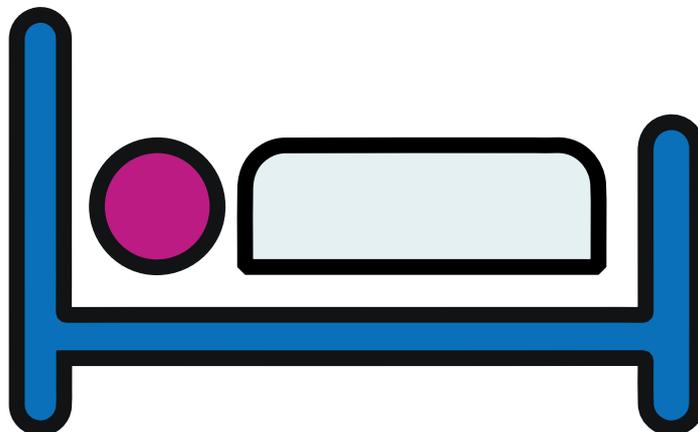
When we experience poor sleep, it's difficult to know where to start to make a change. In order to improve our situation, we must first understand our current sleep routine and habits so that we can identify key areas for improvement. To help with this, we have provided exercises throughout this workbook for you to have a go at. We hope that these support self-knowledge and help you to make better choices to help you and your sleep. Look out for this symbol for these exercises.



If you get stuck, look for the  symbol which provides quotes and contributions from people that have been there and got the poor sleep t-shirt!

We hope that this workbook provides an opportunity to reflect on the changes that you would like to make and inspires you to test out the strategies that have been helpful to others.

**Best wishes,  
The Exchange Recovery College Barnsley**



## Learning outcomes

By completing this workbook you will be able to:

- **Recognise** if sleep is a problem by completing a self-assessment questionnaire.
- **Examine** why we sleep and how this impacts on health and wellbeing.
- **Explore** specific sleep related problems including: Insomnia, sleep apnoea and over sleeping.
- **Record** your current sleep routine using a sleep diary.
- **Describe** one change that you would like to make and explore the strategies available to achieve this.
- **Develop** a sleep improvement plan.

## Why do we need sleep?

First of all, let's agree that sleep is essential and not an optional extra that we can do without. In fact sleep is as important to our bodies as eating, drinking, breathing and is vital for maintaining good mental and physical health. Sleep is also a great healer; promoting recovery from any form of injury, trauma or physical exertion.

It is estimated that we spend approximately one third of our lives asleep and while that is the case it is also evident that sleep related problems are on the increase. This can be in response to: our thoughts keeping us awake at night, a health condition that we struggle to manage and lifestyle choices that may impact on our sleep, e.g. having foods that contain large amounts of sugar or caffeine which may keep us awake at night.

It is fairly common for people to experience a poor night's sleep, especially if we are worried about something, e.g. relationships, house move or health concerns etc. However if this develops into a regular pattern then our health and wellbeing may be affected. Lack of sleep can result in us feeling tired and irritable during the next day, but it won't harm your health. However, more prolonged sleep problems can result in an increased risk of serious medical conditions such as: obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Sleep also helps us to solidify and consolidate memories given that human beings have the capacity to take in, process and store a large amount of information as we go about our daily lives. It is fair to say then, that sleep has an essential part to play in how we experience our thoughts, memories and emotions and in fact how we interact with each other. It is important to consider then whether you want to make sleep a priority and develop healthy habits that will improve your overall health and wellbeing.



# Common sleep problems



## Insomnia

Insomnia is the name given to the condition where you are regularly unable to fall asleep or remain asleep for a long enough period of time. As a result, insomnia can have a negative impact on your mood, energy levels, concentration, relationships, ability to stay awake throughout the day and ability to complete simple daily tasks.

## Sleepwalking

Sleepwalking happens during deep sleep, meaning people can rarely remember doing it. As well as getting out of bed and walking, some people do tasks in their sleep, such as cleaning. Sleepwalking is far more common in children than in adults. Sleepwalking is not dangerous unless you start doing risky activities in your sleep. It is often related to stress or lack of sleep, or (in adults) drinking alcohol.

## Night terrors

A night terror is different to a nightmare in that it occurs during deep sleep, meaning that you rarely remember it. Often an extreme and frightening experience, night terrors make your heart beat faster and might cause you to sweat or scream. Night terrors often begin in childhood, but rarely continue into adulthood. Little is known about how to treat people who have regular night terrors, although, in some cases, they can be linked to a traumatic experience. If this is the case, and your night terrors are affecting your everyday life or ability to sleep, your GP might be able to refer you for therapy to help you deal with the underlying trauma.

## Snoring

Snoring is a very common problem, affecting 41.5% of adults in the UK. Snoring is a breathing problem, rather than a sleep problem, and happens when a blockage in the airway causes the organs that help us breathe to vibrate. It is usually more of a problem for anyone who shares a room with a snorer, rather than for the snorer themselves.

Nasal strips can help by widening the nasal passage and improving the airflow when breathing. It is also better to sleep on your side, as sleeping on your back can cause your tongue to fall backwards and partially block your airflow. Drinking less alcohol, exercising more regularly, and taking steps to lose weight (if you are overweight) can also reduce your snoring.

## Sleep apnoea

Sleep apnoea causes shallow breathing or pauses in breathing that may last up to 30 seconds at a time. In most cases, you will begin to breathe normally again, often making a loud snort or choking sound to clear your airway. People with sleep apnoea can wake up frequently throughout the night feeling sweaty with a dry mouth and a headache. Unlike snoring, it is more important to treat sleep apnoea in order to prevent the brain from being deprived of oxygen. A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device can help by easing your airflow. Your GP will be able to recommend where you can get an assessment for a CPAP device.

If you have concluded that you have a sleep related problem you need to consider the potential effect it could have on your overall health and wellbeing. Poor sleep can increase the risks of poor mental health, and can lead to a range of illnesses such as depression and anxiety. However, it is important to note that you are not alone when tackling this problem as "over 30% of the population currently suffers from insomnia or another type of sleep disorder" (Mental Health Foundation 2020).

# Step 1:

## Do I have a problem with sleep?



If you experience problems with sleep then it's likely that you'll relate to many of the feelings, physical sensations, thoughts and behaviour patterns listed in this first exercise. Using the tick boxes below please mark as many that apply to you.



### Exercise: Do I have a problem with sleep?

#### Feelings

- Tense
- Irritable
- Stressed
- Worried

#### Physical sensations

- Tired / exhausted
- Restless
- Lacking energy
- Poor concentration
- Disturbed sleep

#### Thoughts

- "I'm never going to get enough sleep"
- "I'm bound to have a terrible day tomorrow"
- "I'll be awake all night"
- "I'll end up napping through the day tomorrow and not be able to sleep again!"

#### Behaviours

- Trying to catch up on sleep during the day
- Lying awake in bed at night
- Frequently checking the clock during the night
- Using alcohol or other substances to get to sleep at night

If you've ticked a number of the boxes above, it's likely that you're experiencing problems with sleep. Everyone at one time or another has problems with sleep and so we can all appreciate what it feels like to experience this issue. However, if this problem persists and starts to impact on health and wellbeing, we may want to look at this more closely. By following the steps in this workbook you can learn how to improve your situation (if you want to).

## Step 2: Understanding my sleep routine



Before we explore the helpful habits that support sleep, it's important to become aware of our existing sleep routine. We've learned that completing a sleep diary (like the one opposite) is a really helpful starting point. Here's what other people say about their experience of completing a sleep diary.

*I kept a sleep diary for two weeks...It's funny how you see a problem clearer when you write it down!*



*The diary made me to think about why my sleep had become a problem in the first place. I realised that it started when I stopped working because I lost my routine. Now I know what the problem is, I've started trying to structure my day. I want to look into doing something that gives me a reason to get out of bed. I've thought about volunteering or getting a new hobby.*

*I didn't realise how many energy drinks I was drinking through the day. I wouldn't have noticed if I hadn't written it down. I guess that's why we call them habits – we do them, without thinking!*

*Filling something out in the sleep diary felt irritating at first, especially when you see how much sleep you're not getting, but I stuck with it. It helped me to monitor my progress which actually kept me going when I needed it most. Motivation can be hard to find when you're not sleeping right!*

*It identified problems that I was having with my sleep and got me thinking about the things I needed to do to improve my sleep experience.*

For your next exercise, we're inviting you to keep your own sleep diary for one week. Please see the page opposite for a template that others have found helpful.



**Exercise:** Keep a record of your sleep for one week using the sleep diary provided

Week commencing:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Please complete the section below in the morning 							
I went to bed last night at							
I got up this morning at							
I slept for a total of (hours)							
I woke up during the night (no. of times)							
Please complete the section below in the evening 							
Number of caffeinated drinks today							
Number of alcoholic drinks today							
Time of last caffeinated drink							
My mood today							
What I did in the hour before I fell asleep							

Now that you have completed your sleep diary, take some time to think about what you have learned about yourself and your sleep routine by reflecting on the questions below.



**Exercise:** Draw or describe your current experience of sleep



"I was diagnosed with sleep apnoea and no longer felt confident about getting a good night's sleep and I experienced night terrors and interrupted sleep too"



**Exercise:** How does this impact on your daily life?



I was fearful about going to bed because I felt scared about the prospect of sleep. I would do without sleep altogether, with some nights staying awake all night. The lack of sleep made me lethargic and anti-social because I had no energy to make an effort with friends and family... as a result I became depressed."



**Exercise:** Describe the change that you would like to make to your sleep experience

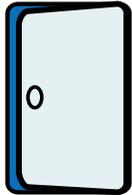
# The four pillars of good sleep (HEAL)

The Mental Health Foundation suggests that good sleep is achievable if we are mindful of these four key areas.



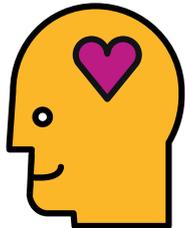
## Health:

Here we recognise the link between poor health and poor sleep whether this is a physical or mental health issues we are experiencing. Seeking adequate support to address this issue is essential to good sleep and improved wellbeing.... A win win situation!



## Environment:

Here issues of noise, temperature, light and distractions will affect your bedroom environment. Make your bedroom an inviting place to sleep cutting down on other influences such as IT gadgets that emit a blue light which will stimulate you and keep you awake.



## Attitude:

Make sleep a priority, not an optional extra. Develop a pro-sleep routine that prepares your body and mind for sleep rather than moving from high energy activities that stimulate you and then expecting sleep to happen magically. Address any psychological causes that cause poor sleep through the use of expert advice from your General practitioner (G.P) or mental health practitioner. This may include being referred for talking therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) which has been found to be especially useful in the treatment of insomnia.



## Lifestyle:

Think of the small sustainable changes you can make to your lifestyle including: Taking up more exercise, eating foods low in salts, fats and sugars and reducing your caffeine, nicotine and alcohol intake all of which can affect your natural sleep cycle.

The four pillars described above are also a road map for good health generally and will lead to you feeling healthier, happier with an improved sense of wellbeing.

## Step 3: Helpful habits for sleep



The best sleep habits are consistent, healthy routines that allow all of us, regardless of our age, to meet our sleep needs every night and keep on top of life's challenges every day. Here are some recommended dos and don'ts that have been tried and tested by others.

### **Do try to go to bed and get up at around the same time every day**

*"I kept a sleep diary for two weeks...It's funny how you see a problem clearer when you write it down!"*



### **Don't spend too much time awake in bed. Only try to sleep when you feel sleepy. If you haven't been able to get to sleep after 20 minutes or more get up and do something calming or boring.**

*"I usually read a book or use a mindfulness app called Insight Timer, they do meditations specifically for sleep and it's free!"*

### **Do activities or rituals that say to your body it's time for sleep as bedtime draws near.**

*"I like to add lavender oil or sprinkle Himalayan salts in my bath. It helps me to relax at the end of the day and I find that I sleep much better when I do."*

*"I've stocked up on bedtime teas. I go for anything that has ingredients like chamomile, lavender or valerian root."*

### **Don't nap unless it's done for less than 1 hour and before 3pm**

*"Falling asleep in my armchair became the most unhelpful habit for me. It turned my routine upside down. I found that keeping busy through the day, and starting to do light exercise made a difference. Being active avoided me being in the arm chair for a start! But it also tired me out and meant I started to sleep better at night. It took time though, so I'd say to others, keep trying and try to be patient, you'll reap the rewards if you keep at it!"*

### **Don't consume alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. Many people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps them to get to sleep at first, but it actually interrupts sleep!**

*"I found that I was using alcohol to relax and fall asleep after a hard day at work. However I used to wake up part way through the night to use the toilet and this interrupted my sleep. I decided to listen to music as an alternative way to relax before bedtime."*

### **Do eat right. A healthy balanced diet will help you to sleep well. However, timing is important. A heavy meal before bed can also interrupt sleep. A warm glass of milk is often recommended as it contains tryptophan. This acts as a natural sleep inducer.**

*"I have found that making smart choices about what I eat and when I eat it improves not just my sleep but makes me feel healthier generally e.g. improving my energy levels during the day and feeling more productive."*



**Don't consume caffeine (tea, coffee, chocolate, cola drinks) or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These substances wake you up rather than slow you down.**

*"I have now decided not to drink caffeinated drinks after 6pm and substituting this with a milky drink. I have learnt that milk contains an amino acid called tryptophan which is supposed to aid sleep. Let's just say it works for me!"*

**Do get your environment right. Make sure that your bedroom is quiet, comfortable and inviting. Try not to use this space for anything other than sleep as this can affect how we think and feel about the space. If you're a light sleeper ear plugs can be helpful and black out blinds/curtains/eye masks.**

*"During the Covid-19 lockdown I worked from home on most days. Using my laptop to check emails in bed was novel at first, but the novelty soon wore off when my association to my bedroom had changed to a work space! It's not surprising that my sleep routine was affected, and not for the better! Now, I have to be strict with myself about where I work and I make sure not to use any devices that will stimulate my brain before bedtime."*

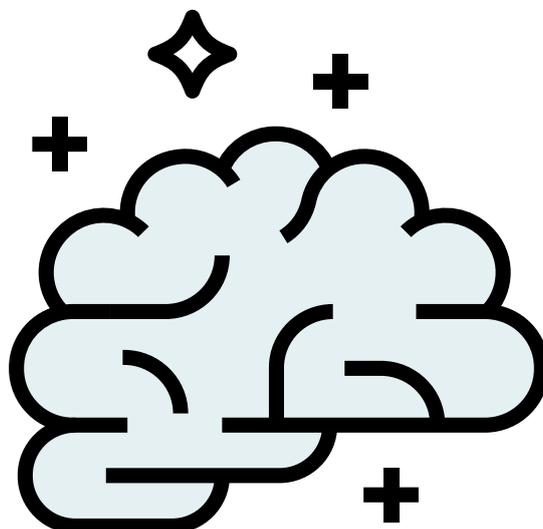
**Don't clock watch. Frequently checking the clock during the night can wake you up and reinforces unhelpful thoughts, such as "I'll never get to sleep!"**

*"I have now decided not to have a clock in my room as I am tempted to keep checking it and I have even started placing my phone on aeroplane mode so that I am not disturbed by it during the night"*

**Do try things out and find what works for you.**

*"I'm more aware of what the issues are for me and I feel more optimistic that I will get between 5 and 6 hours sleep per night! I now have a new CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine, which gives me re-assurance and by practicing healthy habits e.g. developing a sleep routine, my sleep is much improved!"*

So knowing what you know, take some time to mindfully reflect on the unhelpful and helpful habits that you might find yourself in at the moment. This exercise is not about judging yourself or berating your behaviour. It is simply an opportunity to identify areas for positive change, in service of a better sleep longer term. We hope that these questions help.





**Exercise:** What unhelpful habits have you been caught in?



"Cat napping during the day."  
"Clock watching when I can't sleep."  
"Using my phone in bed until late at night, which has really thrown out my routine."



**Exercise:** What helpful habit(s) do you already use?



"Having an understanding of what my main sleep issue is."  
"Recognising the link between my mental health and the impact on sleep."  
"Taking a bath before bed and burning de-stress oils."



**Exercise:** Identify one new habit that you will test out



"Relaxation music before bedtime."  
"Swapping my pre bedtime drink for a decaffeinated option."  
"Trying something boring when I can't sleep...perhaps a book to read."

# Step 4:

## Sleep improvement plan



In the last exercise, we encouraged you to identify one new habit to try out. The key to sustainable change is to incorporate just one change at a time, making sure that it's achievable and something that can become part of your daily life!

Below is a sleep improvement plan that is based on the four pillars of good sleep that we covered earlier in this workbook.

We are inviting you to develop a routine that supports getting a better night's sleep. This might include incorporating some of the dos that we explored in step 3, such as having a milky drink, warm bath or practising relaxation/mindfulness before bedtime. The key is to be consistent in whatever approach you take. Our sleep is improved if we have the same routines daily...even at the weekends!



**Exercise:** Complete the sleep improvement plan below

	Health	Environment	Attitude	Lifestyle
What are the main challenges that I face?				
How can I overcome these challenges and what help do I need, or what strategies will I try?				
What improvements to my sleep pattern would I like to see?				

## Thank you for completing this workbook

We hope that you have found the information in this workbook useful, but remember you are the expert on you, so there is no one better qualified to decide what approaches work best. It's important to note that change doesn't happen overnight. If some of the ideas are not particularly helpful at first, it's worth sticking with them for a few weeks to give them an opportunity to work.

However, if you feel that your situation remains largely unchanged, and you continue to be concerned about the amount and quality of sleep that you are having, you should speak with your GP who will be able to help and provide further guidance and support.

If you would like to tell us about your experience of this workbook or have any enquiries please contact [nick.sennitt@swyt.nhs.uk](mailto:nick.sennitt@swyt.nhs.uk)

## Additional resources

The information in this booklet has been co-produced by people with lived experience of sleep related problems and we have found the following resources particularly useful.

### **Mental Health Foundation**

“Sleep the Full Works” relaxation podcasts.

Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/wellbeing-and-sleep-full-works>

### **The Sleep Council**

Information ranging from: top tips for a better night’s sleep to buying a bed.

Available at: <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>

### **British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association**

For information about any aspects of snoring and sleep apnoea including advice about: diagnosis, treatment and support

Available at: <https://britishsnoring.co.uk/>

### **Mental Health Foundation**

Mindfulness and sleep.

Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/m/mindfulness>

### **Sleep Foundation**

For information on sleep, sleep conditions, sleep and mental health and current research.

Available at: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

### **Mind**

How to cope with sleep problems.

Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/tips-to-improve-your-sleep/>

### **Sleepio**

Information on sleep and cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBTI)

Available at: <https://www.sleepio.com/>

If you are interested in accessing further wellbeing workbooks or learning more about The Exchange Recovery College please get in touch on 01226 730433 or email: [Barnsley.Recoverycollege@swyt.nhs.uk](mailto:Barnsley.Recoverycollege@swyt.nhs.uk)

To explore the concepts in this workbook further, The Exchange Recovery College provides a course entitled *Helpful habits for sleep*. A gym is also available on site to support both mental and physical health and wellbeing. For further information please contact the college on the details provided above.

## References

Mental Health Foundation, *Sleep the Full Works relaxation podcasts*. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/wellbeing-and-sleep-full-works>

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