

Handy Fact Sheet Insomnia and sleep hygiene

What is insomnia?

- Insomnia is finding it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep
- It can also be where you do not wake up feeling refreshed or do not feel alert during the next day
- Sleep is vital to allow the body to recover and repair itself.

How do I know if I have insomnia?

- The right sleep length **for you** might vary from 4 to 10 hours
- The **important thing is how alert you feel during the day**, and how awake you feel
- If you don't sleep long but feel refreshed and alert, then you are having enough sleep.

What is sleep hygiene?

- Sleep hygiene is a series of steps you can take to give you the best chance of getting to sleep naturally
- The next page lists some of the ideas.

Is lack of sleep a problem?

- Lack of sleep can be serious if it lasts for more than a week or so. You could end up with worse mental health problems, such as:
- You might start taking drugs (including alcohol) to help you sleep
- You might cope less well with stress, have depression and anxiety, and have more accidents.

What causes poor sleep?

Insomnia is often a symptom of other illnesses rather than an "illness" in its own right. It can be caused by many things, such as:









- Mental health problems such as depression, PTSD, anxiety, stress
- Drugs such as nicotine, caffeine
- Prescribed medicines e.g. some medicines for depression, heart and high blood pressure, asthma and arthritis
- Physical illness e.g. heart disease, breathing problems, incontinence, hormone changes, bowel problems, pain, restless legs.
- Getting older
- Poor sleep is more common in women, a history of light sleeping, and if there are work or financial problems
- External reasons such as too much noise or light at bedtime.

Our website has a list of possible causes and more advice about sleep hygiene.

What can I do about poor sleep?

- See over the page for some information about "sleep hygiene" which will help
- If all this doesn't help then there are other things you can try
- There are some psychological treatments, alternative therapies and, if all else fails, medicines.

Sleep hygiene helps you get to sleep naturally

	<p>Do not have any caffeine, alcohol and nicotine in the three hours before going to bed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, colas and chocolate • A hot milky decaffeinated drink at bedtime may help • Alcohol may help you get off to sleep but it breaks up the sleep so you feel less refreshed in the morning • It also makes you wee more, which will wake you up • Nicotine can be a stimulant and keep you awake, although it can help some smokers relax.
	<p>Do not stay in bed for more than about an hour if you do not sleep</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get up for a short while and then go back to bed again • But don't watch television or check your phone • Reading a book is best.
	<p>Avoid daytime naps or long periods of sitting or lying around</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to keep active during the day – exercise helps release growth hormone which helps your body • Get at least 8 hours natural daylight a day so your brain knows there has been a day.
	<p>Make sure that the bed and bedroom are comfortable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People tend to sleep better in colder rooms but keeping your hands and feet warm helps many • The scent of lavender in a bedroom can help sleep • Avoid excess noise and temperature • Ear-plugs or leaving a radio on gentle music may help if there is a lot of noise you can't ignore.
	<p>Try to have a regular bedtime routine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A warm bath or gentle exercise a few hours before bedtime can help, but avoid hard exercise or mental activity within 2 hours of bedtime.
	<p>Get up at the same time every morning, no matter how well or long you slept</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is easier said than done but this will help you to be ready for sleep the next night • If you sleep in after a poor night's sleep it will be harder to fall asleep the next night.
	<p>Carbohydrate can help sleep</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some carbohydrate e.g. pasta can help, but do not eat a big meal within two hours of going to bed • Sugar and vitamin tablets may stop you sleeping.
	<p>Do not look at back-lit screens for an hour before bedtime</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back-lit screens produce a blue light that stops your brain releasing melatonin. Without melatonin to trigger sleep it is harder to fall asleep • Back-lit screens include televisions, computers, iPads and mobile phones • Kindle screens aren't lit from behind so are OK • Just dimming the lights in the room can also help • Wearing yellow glasses or clip-ons in the evening cuts down the blue light and solves the problem.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about sleep, insomnia and sleep hygiene. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how medicines work, doses and about the conditions.

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