



UNIVERSITY of
BRADFORD

Counselling Service

A Good Night's Sleep

*Information
and self-help*



Sleep is essential for survival as it recharges energy levels to enable effective physical and mental functioning. Adults need approximately 7-9 hours sleep per night although this varies for each individual. Problems with sleeping can include:

- Difficulty falling to sleep
- Waking in the night (sometimes because of nightmares)
- Waking too early
- Waking feeling un-refreshed

Although sleep problems are not life-threatening, they can feel distressing, exhausting and depressing. They can affect your immune system, your emotions and your ability to make sound decisions.

What's the best way to get to sleep?

■ Switch OFF

Aim to switch off tablets, phones and laptops 2 hours before bedtime. They not only stimulate the mind but also generate short wavelength blue light which interferes with our sleep hormone melatonin and delays the whole sleep cycle. Put them outside the bedroom if possible.

■ Temperature Control

Ideally the temperature should be between 18 and 21 degrees. Too hot and melatonin is affected, too cold and it's hard to drop off. Use light bedding in summer. Try a hot water bottle in winter.

■ Cut Down / Out

Sugar, alcohol, caffeine and nicotine create havoc with sleep as they stimulate the central nervous system.

■ Sleep time routine

Establish a regular sleep and waking time and do not sleep during the day; relax physically (try a hot bath with lavender oil) and mentally (no work, 'heavy' reading or viewing) for an hour before sleep time; try warm, milky drinks or camomile tea before sleeping; experiment with reading a light book or listening to something relaxing.

■ Don't fear sleeplessness

Put a time limit on 'getting to sleep' eg 20 minutes. If you are still awake, don't fight it, get up and do something else for a short time. Try one of the mindfulness exercises below, create stories in your mind, read a novel, etc.

■ Mindfulness / Breathing Exercise

As you lie in bed bring your awareness to your breathing. Can you feel your breath coming in and going out? No need to control your breath. Just relax and breathe however is natural to you. You might say to yourself 'in' and 'out' to match your breathing. Or perhaps think of the word 'relax' on each out breath. Concentrate on your chest or abdomen rising and falling - can you feel it? Your mind will probably wander at some point, and thoughts will arise. Each time it does, don't worry about it. Acknowledge the thoughts you have, then gently bring your focus back to your breathing. You may find this happens many times, that's perfectly normal. Don't criticize yourself or worry that you're not doing it properly or it isn't working. Just keep bringing your attention back to the breath. And as you do this, little by little feel your body gently sink into your mattress.

■ Mindfulness / Body Scan

Start by imagining your mind leaving your head and travelling through your body to one of your feet. Once there, imagine your toe and foot muscles tightening and then relaxing. Then imagine taking your mind up to your calf, knee and thigh. Stopping in each place to repeat the muscle tensing and relaxing. You can then repeat the exercise with your other leg. Then start with a hand and work your way up both arms. Scan, tense and relax your back, stomach, chest, shoulders, head and face. You can either imagine your muscles tensing and relaxing, or physically tense and relax them. Whichever you feel more comfortable with. You will know it's starting to work for you when your limbs start to feel heavy and are happy to sink comfortably into your mattress. You may

find your mind wanders many times, acknowledge these thoughts in a positive way, but bring your mind gently back to concentrate on your body.

■ Lifestyle

Ensure you take regular exercise and eat a healthy diet; assess if you seem overwhelmed and relinquish some tasks or responsibilities; talk or write out any worries and think constructively and creatively about making necessary changes; include relaxation and fun in your life; develop activities that boost your confidence and self-esteem.

Getting Support

It may be useful to consider your life as a whole to gain insight into the reasons for your disturbed sleep. It may be linked with current stressors but also past or future issues may affect sleeping patterns. You may wish to evaluate your stress factors by talking with a counsellor.

Medical support and information can be obtained from GP practices or health centres. A Pharmacist can give advice on products that can aid sleep or perhaps a health shop for advice on 'natural' remedies.

On-line resources / self-help:

www.bradford.ac.uk/counselling for an extensive range of online information and self-help material.



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