

## Sleep hygiene

Sleep plays an important role in our well-being. However, difficulties in falling asleep and sleeping problems are very common and a part of life. The causes of sleeping problems are diverse and it is not possible for us to be able to affect all of them. There are though, many things which we can do, to make getting a good night's sleep easier.

- Exercise and daytime activities make it easier to fall asleep in the evening. Go for a walk or to the gym, do the housework, play with your children or meet up with some friends. Avoid though any strenuous exercise just before bedtime.
- Tobacco, sugar and caffeine drinks, such as coffee and tea will keep us awake. Avoid them before going to bed.
- If you have many things on your mind during the day, write them down as they pop up. Worrying at night is not helpful
- Light from our television, mobile phone and computer screens may keep us awake. Avoid these activities just before going to sleep.
- Avoid also watching horror movies or thrillers and watching the news before bedtime
- Establish an enjoyable routine before going to bed: go for a short walk, open the window for a second and air the bedroom, take a shower/bath, have a warm drink, listen to some soothing music or read for a while.
- Try to fall asleep and wake up at regular times. Only go to bed when you are sleepy.
- If you have stayed awake all night, take only a short daytime nap the following day (10-20min).

### IF YOU CAN'T SLEEP

Sometimes our body feels restless or our mind is cluttered with many different thoughts. At such times, it may be difficult to fall asleep. We can then practice how to calm our mind and our body.

- When we are awake at night, things often appear to be more problematic and more difficult than they actually are. Night time worrying is unhelpful. It is better to deal with problems during the day.
- Talk to yourself in a calming manner. Tell yourself that now is the time to rest.
- You can use visual images to help you relax. The use of images may require a little practice. If you become aware that your thoughts wander whilst focusing on a certain image, just let them gently go back to what you are visualising.
  - Imagine that you have placed your disturbing thoughts in a box, which you can then throw away from a high place. You can also put the box in a safe place until morning.

- Imagine a meadow where there is a flock of sheep. Count the sheep as they jump over a fence
- Imagine a peaceful and safe place where you can rest. Imagine what this place looks like, what kinds of sounds and smells are there.
- By paying attention to our own senses we can also calm our thoughts: be aware of what sounds you can hear or how the duvet or pillow feels when you are lying in bed.
- If your body feels tense, you might want to do a relaxation exercise. You can listen to different relaxation exercises for example on YouTube: [goo.gl/1VXLdr](https://goo.gl/1VXLdr)
- If you can't get to sleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing and calming: read, listen to some relaxing music, do a relaxation exercise or write down your thoughts on paper. Go back to bed only when you are tired.
- Do not *try too hard* to fall asleep, this might make you frustrated and make falling asleep even harder. If you can't fall asleep, try and be compassionate with yourself.
- During the night it is good to have a restful posture, even if you can't fall asleep. Often people who suffer from sleeping difficulties feel that at night they haven't slept at all. Generally however, even then, we will sleep for short periods, even if we are not aware of it.

#### IF YOU HAVE A NIGHTMARE

- If you have a nightmare, remember to tell yourself that it is only a dream and that you are safe.
- Place in your bedroom objects, which remind you that you are safe. Focus on these, when you are woken by a nightmare.
- Get up and do something soothing. For example, drink a glass of water, read a book or listen to some relaxing music.
- If you have continuous nightmares, you can write them down or talk to a friend or caring professional about them.
- You can also make a drawing of your dream or the images related to it.
- When we are alone at night, unpleasant feelings can be almost unbearable. At this time, being able to calm ourselves is especially important. It is also often the only thing that we can actually do in the middle of the night. It can also be helpful to remind yourself, that although the night may seem never ending, the morning always comes.

Do not hesitate to speak about your sleeping problems with your loved one's, a doctor, nurse, psychologist or other professional person. Talking, relaxation exercises and other techniques can all help us in getting a good night's sleep.