

Improving your sleep

Many of us have trouble sleeping or staying asleep sometimes... but if it's happening a lot, we can build up a sleep debt, which takes a toll on our physical and emotional wellbeing. It's then common to get into a vicious cycle where you worry about whether you will be able to sleep, feel anxious and irritated when you can't, and find yourself lying there stewing. If you often find yourself awake during the night, after 20-30 minutes get up and do something fairly boring for a while, before going back to bed.

Below is a list of sleep hygiene tips – recommendations for improving your sleep. If none of them help, see your GP in case you have an issue which needs treatment, such as obstructive sleep apnoea.

sleep environment:

- Keep your bedroom for sleep and intimacy – do chores and work elsewhere
- Have a comfortable mattress and pillow. A weighted blanket can help too.
- keep your bedroom cooler than your living area, and ensure it's dark enough. You may need block out curtains or an eye mask.
- Keep it quiet: turn off your phone so you aren't disturbed by notification beeps. Use ear plugs if you are easily woken by noise
- minimise artificial light in the evenings. If you have dimmer switches, use them.

routine:

- have consistent waking and bed times, even at the weekend. Try not to skip sleep to work, study or socialise.
- Avoid daytime naps, or keep them short
- get outside in the natural light early in the day to maintain your circadian rhythm
- ensure you have a healthy, well-balanced diet
- exercise regularly (though after very intense exercise, your stress hormones may still be raised enough to interfere with sleep).
- eat a lighter evening meal so your digestive system is not overloaded at night
- Avoid electronic devices in the hour before you go to bed; the mental stimulation and blue light can be activating
- Have a relaxing pre-bed routine (e.g. listening to calm music, changing into sleep clothes, having a warm bath, or using relaxation exercises such as paced breathing).
- Avoid caffeine for several hours before bed
- Reduce/stop smoking and drinking – nicotine is a stimulant, and although alcohol can help you fall asleep, the effect wears off, which can give you a disrupted sleep.

Finally, in a recent BBC programme, UK sleep expert Dr Colin Espie gave this advice to an insomniac of 20 years to increase sleep efficiency: either go to bed slightly later, or set your alarm earlier. And when you go to bed, actively try to stay awake. It sounds totally counterintuitive, but apparently it really helps!

If you can't sleep because you have a family, relationship or emotional problem, please talk to someone. Homebuilders can help – phone us on 09 425 7048 or 0800-100-037 or see our new website <https://www.homebuildersfs.org>

