



Sweet Dreams



A simple resource to help start
improving your sleep





Introduction

Sleep! We often complain that we don't get enough of it. For many of us it serves as a barometer to our mood, mental health and general performance. For this reason when we can't get enough of it – it feels somewhat catastrophic. Sleep is actually an essential component to our overall wellbeing. As humans we can last without food three times longer than we can without sleep.

We only have to take a look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs to see that sleep is a basic physiological need essential for our survival

Sleep is an altered state of consciousness. We may think of sleep as a time when our body shuts down but actually sleep is an active time when restoration and strengthening takes place... an industrious time if you like. This restoration is complex but the rest and recuperation is most likely to happen when our parasympathetic nervous system is activated.

There is no set amount of time that we need to sleep for – this will be relative to the individual, different strokes for different folks. An average sleep time is 7.75 hours.

Throughout the night we experience a number of different cycles lasting between 90 – 110 minutes. A good night's sleep will include 5 cycles. These cycles change pattern throughout our lifetime. Throughout our lifetime these cycles will be influenced by medication, hormones, alcohol and behavioural aspects.



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Sleep is just as important as healthy nutrition and exercise

A few of the benefits...

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- Sleep is an essential component of our health and wellbeing
- With enough sleep we are less likely to feel anxious or depressed
- Essential for children's growth
- There is a strong hypothesis supporting that information take in throughout our day is logged and recorded although psychologists and neuroscience aren't 100% sure
- Important time to maintain cognitive skills such as speech, memory, thinking and brain development. Again, still an area of research - some neuroscientists say neural pathways are strengthened.
- Hormones are synthesised
- It is a processing time for the days intense emotions - gets you ready for the next day preparing us for being awake

Man is the only mammal that willingly delays sleep

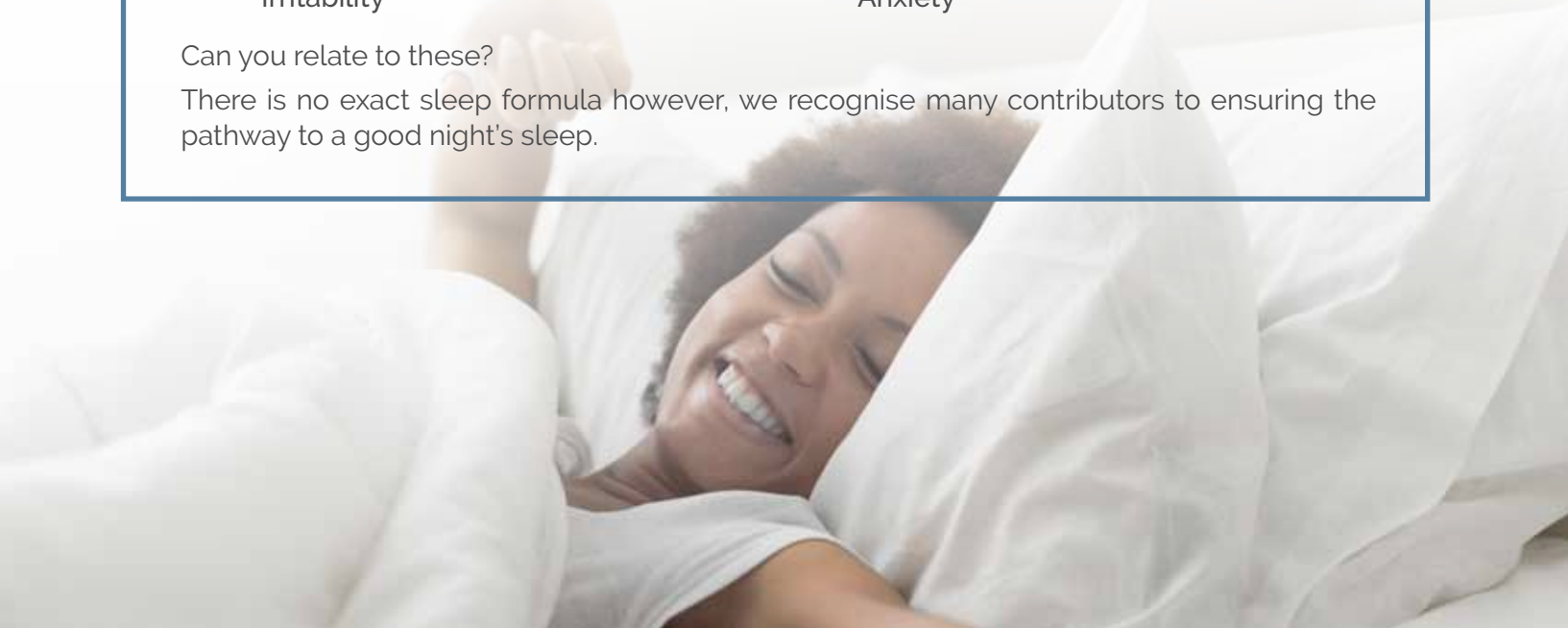
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Through research and discussions with clients and friends there is a general consensus of the results of lack of sleep:

- Decreased performance
- Lowered resilience
- Difficulty responding to change
- Emotional outbursts
- Irritability
- Forgetfulness
- Adverse health effects
- Being accident prone
- Low Confidence
- Anxiety

Can you relate to these?

There is no exact sleep formula however, we recognise many contributors to ensuring the pathway to a good night's sleep.



Rituals & Routines





Your Mind

For many of us when we were babies our carers would stick to a routine like "Bath, Bottle, Bed". The purpose for this is to train your mind to associate with sleep time. We are no different as adults - by establishing simple rituals can go a long way. Whilst these are not set in stone for longevity consider committing to this the majority of the time. Some rituals to think about including in your routine...

Free your mind

Unfinished business

Close your work day by ticking off everything you have accomplished and then creating your new list for the next day. This way unfinished business is checked off both physically and in your mind. Include planned events in your check off so you are not crisis managing and there is less chance you'll be ruminating in your sleep

Worries

If you often wake feeling anxious in the night, this end of work day check out could also be the ideal opportunity to make a list of your worries and what you are doing about them. To kick start your list start by thinking of the worrying things that wake you. Now if you wake with a worrying thought this list is your way of dealing with it and knowing that you are doing something about it. This is not to be done just before bedtime as doing so could in fact act as a hindrance to sleep.

Stimulants good and bad...

Exercise - let's get physical!

"Increasingly, the scientific evidence is encouraging as regular physical activity may serve as a non-pharmaceutical alternative to improve sleep." Studies show how people who are sedentary have a harder time falling asleep and staying asleep compared to people who exercise regularly. For significantly better sleep aim to exercise at least 150 minutes a week. Aim to finish high energy exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime.

Reduce stimulants

Nicotine, caffeine, recreational drugs! All of these stimulate your central nervous system. Caffeine is a drug that promotes alertness and acts as a stimulant. Adenosine is a substance found in our bodies that promotes sleep. Caffeine is an adenosine antagonist - so it keeps us from feeling sleepy. Whilst caffeine has some positive effects to aid alertness and performance, if taken too late in the day has an adverse effect on sleep.

Research suggests limiting intake 6 hours before bedtime. Also become aware of different products that contain caffeine, besides coffee. Tea, energy drinks, sodas, chocolate are a few to consider.





What you put in is what you get out...

Food

To state the obvious – don't go to bed on a full tummy. Stop eating approximately 2 hours before. What we eat affects our sleep. Food containing the amino acid tryptophan which is a component of the sleep related chemical serotonin could potentially make you drowsy, although research is still underway as to whether the amount in food is enough to change your sleep. Typical food containing this is turkey, eggs, chicken, fish and nuts. Food to avoid before bed are those that create system overload the likes of fatty, fried, spicy food.



Maintain a healthy water intake during the day (8 - 10 glasses) Staying hydrated allows your brain to work best, leaving you feeling rejuvenated after a good night's sleep. Consider a calming herbal tea like chamomile tea which can be soporific. It has been used for centuries not only to create calm and promote sleep but for many other health benefits too.

Rethink a drink

Alcohol

For those who enjoy an alcoholic beverage you may relate to nodding off nicely only to awake a couple of hours later. This initial deep sleep is the restorative time for your body – only you are bought out of this stage. Alcohol is a depressant and for this reason prevents you from benefiting from deep sleep. It is also diuretic encouraging the body to lose extra water, increasing bathroom visits whilst dehydrating you too. How often have you woken needing to gulp down water? Furthermore, it is a muscle relaxant which sounds good in theory, only it relaxes the muscles of the throat, mouth and nose blocking air flowing smoothly, resulting in snoring and a fitful night's sleep interrupting the natural stages of sleep. Alcohol is a toxin which takes approximately an hour to metabolise per unit. Do you want to sleep to restore or sleep to process a toxin all night? Also think about the effect alcohol induced snoring has on your partner's quality of sleep.



101010s or ZZZs



Technology and gadgets - no tech before bed or in the bedroom!

Dark and bedtime tells your body that it is time for melatonin production, an essential hormone for sleep. Lights and glow from screens viewed before bedtime or left on all night will impede sleep. The blue light emitted prevents the release of melatonin. Our pineal gland in the brain starts to release this magic hormone a couple of hours before bedtime, so imagine how disruptive looking at tech before bed is for your body. Avoiding screens at least an hour before bedtime breaks some strongly ingrained habits for many of us. Establishing healthier approaches and a change in routine takes commitment but pays dividends, or ZZZZZZs rather.

Relaxation

Relaxation techniques are not just about enjoying a hobby but actively following a process that decreases the stress hormones, promoting relaxation and improved overall health. There are many techniques we could include but as a starting point try deep breathing. This has an instantaneous effect on our rest and digestive system. There are different types of deep breathing and if you don't have a favourite, try the 4 -7-8 breathing. For those of you familiar with Mindfulness, apply this practice to still the mind and induce calm.





Scene
Setting





Make your bedroom a sanctuary...

A warm, nurturing and comfortable environment will be conducive to sleep

Darkness

Light inhibits sleep – it's what tells us to get up and go! The sleep inducing hormone, melatonin, is produced in abundance in the dark. Light disrupts the synthesis of this hormone and confuses the body clock. Hence our modern culture and abundance of artificial lighting can have an injurious outcome.

Temperature

Find a temperature that works for you. Contributing factors are your pyjamas, duvet weight and room heating. An ideal room temperature is somewhere between 15 – 22 degrees Celsius .


Your mattress

Out with the old, in with the new! If your mattress is older than 8 years and especially if you are waking up with a stiff neck and aches you are not getting the level of support needed.

Aroma

Aromatherapy makes scents

The use of an essential oil not only scents the room but has a physiological effect on you too. Lavender specifically is used to calm the nervous system and helps with tension and emotional stress. A couple of drops in your bath, on your pillow or perhaps circulated through an aromatherapy diffuser are options. If Lavender is not for you then oils like Vetiver, Chamomile, Ylang Ylang and Bergamot have a similar effect.



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What
Next?



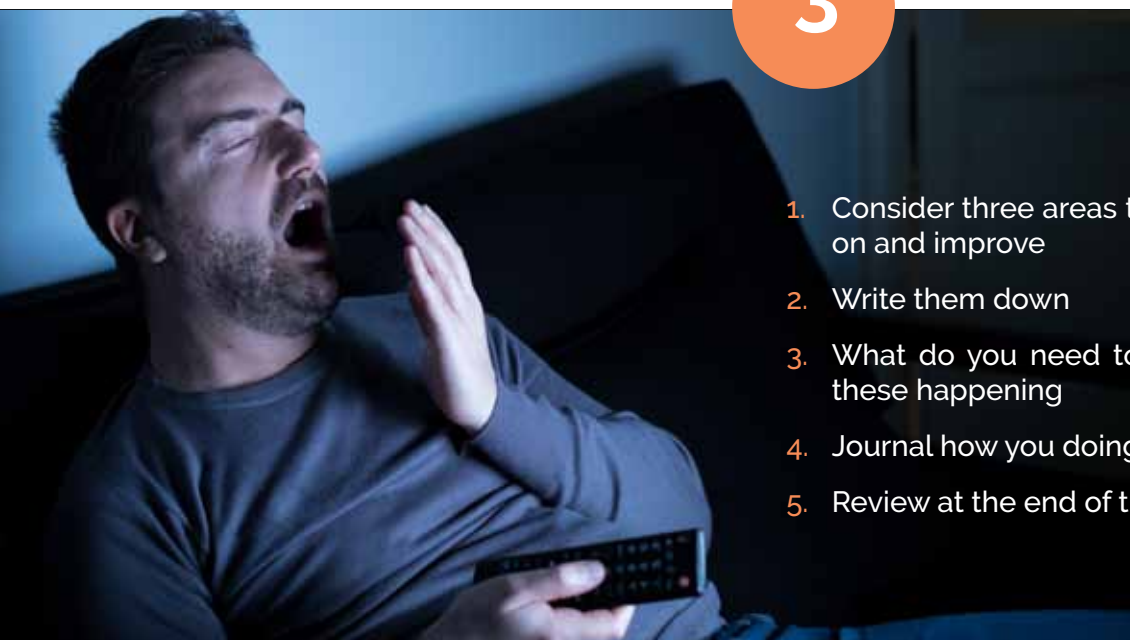


One third of adults don't get enough sleep.

Let's reduce this - **TAKE ACTION!**

There's no time like the present!

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1. Consider three areas that you would like to work on and improve
2. Write them down
3. What do you need to put in place to facilitate these happening
4. Journal how you doing daily
5. Review at the end of the week

Finally...

If lack of sleep is becoming a big issue for you and affecting your performance, consider sharing how you feel with your Manager.

Looking after yourself is not just about physical things like nutrition and diet. As we have seen, mindset is a huge part of good sleep hygiene. If you are struggling with something deeper, like relationship difficulties, anxiety or depression, you may benefit from working this out with the help of counselling or therapy.

Working with a non-judgemental professional to reflect on what is on your mind and why will definitely support your efforts to sleep better and help you set up good routines for the future.

To find a qualified therapist, explore the options on the BACP or UKCP websites - here are the links:

www.bacp.co.uk

www.ukcp.co.uk



References

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Fostering wellbeing habits and managing stress can contribute to improving sleep. If this is an area you and your team would like to explore, we would love to chat.

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