Sleep hygiene

This factsheet explains what sleep hygiene is, why it is so important and what you can do to help improve the quality of your sleep. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

What is sleep hygiene?
Your bedroom environment and your habits (behaviours) during the day, as well as your habits before you go to bed, all play a role in how well you sleep.

'Sleep hygiene' is the term used to describe healthy habits that you can practice during the day to help you get a good night's sleep.

Why is good sleep hygiene important?
Sleep is essential for your physical and mental wellbeing. It allows your body time to recharge and your mind to process information. Without enough quality sleep, our brains are unable to function properly.

Good sleep hygiene can help improve your sleep quality, which in turn can:
• improve your mood
• improve your concentration and memory
• prevent you from developing sleep disorders (such as insomnia)
• help you maintain a healthy weight
• lower your risk of developing serious health conditions (such as diabetes and heart disease)
• help your body fight off diseases

What are the signs of poor sleep hygiene?
If you have poor sleep hygiene, you may:
• find it difficult to fall asleep
• wake up several times during the night
• feel tired during the day

How can I improve my sleep hygiene?
We have included some simple lifestyle changes below. You can make these changes during the day and just before you go to bed to help improve your sleep hygiene, which will help you get the best possible night's sleep.

Keep regular sleep hours
Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day (including on weekends and free days) will help regulate your body clock and will train your body to rest and remain alert at certain times of the day.

Create a restful bedroom environment
You can do this by:
- keeping the room temperature at a comfortable level (a very warm room is more likely to disrupt your sleep)
- keeping the room as dark as possible
- keeping the room as quiet as possible or using earplugs

Only use your bedroom for sleep, sex and getting dressed
Avoid watching television, listening to the radio or reading in bed. This will help your brain to recognise your bed as a place for sleeping.

Stop using electronic devices before going to bed
This includes computers, smartphones and televisions, as they can all stimulate your brain for several hours after use, making falling asleep difficult.

Avoid stimulants after lunch
Caffeine can take up to six hours to wear off, so avoid anything containing caffeine after 2pm. This includes coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate.

Nicotine is a stimulant and will keep you awake, so avoid smoking before going to bed.

Alcohol may make you feel drowsy, but it does not improve sleep quality and will make you need the toilet more often than usual, which will disrupt your sleep. Avoid drinking alcohol before going to bed and try not to rely on it to help you fall asleep.

Eat a light meal before going to bed
Going to bed too full can force your digestive system to keep working when it should be resting. Likewise, going to bed hungry can also disturb your sleep.

Exercise regularly during the day
Exercising during the day can help you have a better night's sleep. However, vigorous exercise within three hours of going to bed may delay your sleep. Try doing a relaxing exercise before going to bed to help you sleep, such as yoga.

Get regular exposure to natural light
Morning and early afternoon light exposure will help you to maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle. Too much light exposure in the evening can prevent you from feeling sleepy.

Create a relaxing bedtime routine
When you are stressed or anxious, your body produces more cortisol (the stress hormone). Give yourself one to one and a half hours to wind down before going to sleep. Try meditating or having a warm bath before going to bed.

Limit or avoid taking naps during the day
Staying awake during the day will make you more likely to fall asleep at night. Taking a nap late afternoon or in the evening is likely to affect the quality of your night-time sleep. If you do take a daytime nap, this should be no more than 30 minutes.

Don't force yourself to try to go to sleep
This is likely to make you more alert. Remove or hide any clocks from your view so you are not constantly checking the time. If you are unable to sleep within 30 minutes of going to bed, get up, go to a different room and do something relaxing for a short while (avoid anything with bright lights). Return to your bedroom when you feel sleepy. Repeat this as many times as necessary during the night.

The key to good sleep hygiene is consistency. Find out what tips work best for you and create your own sleep hygiene checklist to help you get the best sleep possible each night.

How much sleep do I need?
There is no set rule as to how much sleep you need. The amount of sleep needed varies from person to person.

Sleep patterns can also vary with age, with older people often needing less sleep than younger adults.

Useful links
www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/mind-body/getting-a-good-nights-sleep

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/how-sleep-better

www.headspace.com/sleep/sleep-hygiene

www.aasm.org/resources/pdf/products/howtosleepbetter_web.pdf

www.sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits

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