

BETTER SLEEP

SESSION 2 COURSE WORKBOOK



Session 2: PREPARING FOR BED

This term, **sleep hygiene**, refers to some of the things that we do every day, plus the things we do in preparation for bed, that can be changed to improve our sleep. We will divide these into a) Lifestyle issues and b) Bedroom factors.

Lifestyle Issues:

Caffeine: Sleep Enemy Number One! Caffeine is a central nervous system stimulant and is very good at keeping us awake! Caffeine is found not only in tea and coffee, but also in chocolate, soft drinks, and over-the-counter medicines. It stays in our system for many hours after we consume it, so it is best to have nothing containing caffeine after say six o'clock at night. If you decide to cut down, or stop, consuming caffeine but are in the habit of having caffeine-containing drinks several times a day, it is best to cut down gradually to prevent the onset of withdrawal symptoms (such as headaches, stomach cramps).



Nicotine: another central nervous system stimulant. We often feel that having a cigarette calms us down, but the overall effect of nicotine is to make us more alert – and therefore less likely to sleep. If you smoke, try to smoke less in the evening, cut out that 'last cigarette before bed' and DON'T smoke if you wake during the night! If you quit smoking altogether it is likely that you will find your sleep improves as you become gradually healthier.



Alcohol: is a central nervous system depressant – which would be expected to help us to sleep. However, it has been found that even moderate quantities of alcohol can disrupt our sleep. Although we might fall asleep more quickly after consuming alcohol, the withdrawal symptoms which occur during the night as our bodies break down the alcohol, cause us go into lighter sleep.



As alcohol also dehydrates us, we are likely to wake up several times feeling thirsty and may also need to go to the toilet. It is inadvisable to use alcohol to aid sleep when we have a sleep problem as we can quickly become dependent . . . and then need ever increasing quantities of alcohol to have the same effect. Again, the recommendation is to avoid alcohol after six o'clock at night.

Diet: a light snack at bedtime can be a good idea, as hunger can cause wakefulness. But only a light snack – going to bed on a full stomach is a very bad idea as this is likely to stop us falling asleep or cause us to wake during the night.



A warm, milky drink at bedtime appears to be helpful in terms of falling asleep, though there is no evidence that it actually improves the quality of our sleep. It is not a good idea to eat anything if we are awake during the night – our bodies will come to expect food at these times and will wake us up so we can eat!

It is important to note that the heavier we are, the more likely we are to snore – and this can disturb both our sleep and that of others in the household! If we do decide to lose weight it is a good idea to aim to lose weight slowly as too rapid weight loss can lead to broken, disturbed sleep. It is recommended to try and lose no more than a pound or two a week.

Exercise: people who are physically fit tend to sleep better – so getting fit can help our sleep. Exercising at least three times a week for 20–30 minutes will make us fitter. It is important to do something we enjoy (walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, football etc) that gets our hearts pumping.

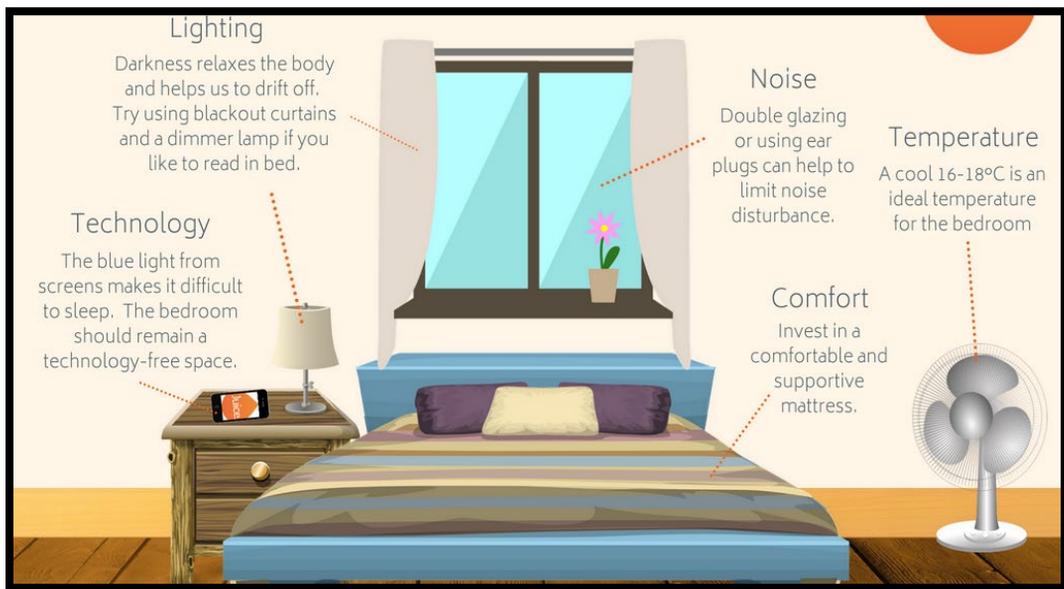


If you are unsure about taking up regular exercise for health reasons, check with your GP before commencing any programme.

Avoid strenuous exercise in the latter part of the evening – although this may tire us out physically, exercise raises our metabolic rate, which makes sleep less likely to happen.

Bedroom Factors:

If we do not have a sleep problem, then we are often able to sleep even in very difficult conditions (e.g. noisy, cold, uncomfortable etc). If we do have a sleep problem, then the aim is to make our bedrooms as close to ideal as possible.



Noise: unexpected or sudden noises can rouse us from even deep sleep if loud enough. While we can get used to these noises with time, and become able to sleep through them, it is possible that our sleep actually becomes lighter because of them. Soundproof your bedroom – and if that’s not possible, then wearing ear-plugs (just until you have established a good regular sleep pattern) can help with this problem.

Room temperature: too warm a bedroom can cause us to be restless, wake more often and have fewer dreams. Too cold can make it harder to fall asleep and can cause

unpleasant dreams. Ideal temperature is around 18°C, so try and get it as close to that as possible.

Body temperature: a hot bath or shower at bedtime is not a good idea as it raises our body temperature, which makes it more difficult to fall asleep. Our temperature drops to below 'normal' when we are sleeping. Either have your bath a couple of hours before bedtime or have a warm bath or shower (or a cool one if the weather is hot!).

Air quality: fresh air promotes sleep, and a room full of stale air may cause restless sleep – so leave a window open while you are sleeping, if you can. If it's too cold or noisy outside, then at least open the window for a bit before you go to bed and leave your bedroom door open.

Light: light stops us falling asleep and wakes us up. Until your sleep problem is resolved, total darkness is best – black-out blinds or curtain-linings (or even an old blanket covering the window), no lights on inside the house, and not even a visible illuminated clock-face in the bedroom (turn it round so that you can't see the light from it)! If any of this is not possible then try covering your eyes with an eye-mask instead.

Mattress and pillows: the more comfortable we are, the more likely we are to fall asleep and sleep well. A mattress is very much an individual choice, so 'try before you buy' to make sure it feels right for you. It is said that you should change your mattress every ten years, but what is important is that it feels comfortable to you – if you can feel springs digging into you, or there is a hollow in the centre of the mattress, you are unlikely to sleep soundly! Again pillows are very much down to individual preference, but again make sure that they haven't gone all sad and floppy (if they have they are unlikely to provide the right level of support for our heads).

In summary, if we can make our bedrooms as dark and quiet as possible, maintain the temperature and air quality as close to the ideal as we can and maximise the comfort of our beds, we will be giving ourselves the best chance of resolving our sleep problems. This is not the whole answer, but it is a very important step.

Other things we can do to prepare for sleep:

Wind-down routine:

It is important to gradually wind down during the course of the evening – going to bed immediately after watching an action-thriller, or wrestling with household bills or work difficulties is likely to result in us lying staring at the ceiling, feeling wide awake and stressed.

It is helpful if we can start our wind-down routine somewhere between an hour or ninety minutes before bed-time. We should spend this time doing something we find relaxing – listening to music, reading etc. It is especially important not to spend the last part of the evening watching TV or using an i-Pad, or any other kind of LED screen. This is because these devices emit a colour of light that fools our brains into thinking it is still daytime and this can delay the release of the hormone that prepares us for sleep.

It is also a good idea to engage in a regular routine immediately before we go to bed – i.e. do the same things in the same order every single night – it's a bit of a clue for our brains:



'Oh, I recognise this sequence of events – I must be heading for bed and sleep!'

So, for example, we might have a warm, milky drink, while reading a relaxing book, then put the cat out, lock the back door, put on our night-clothes, clean our teeth, climb into bed and switch the bedside light off.

Strengthening the bed-sleep connection:

in the same way that we can train our pet animals to do certain things, we are also able to train ourselves! We are never able to make ourselves fall asleep – in fact, the harder we try, the less likely it is that this will happen. We are unable to talk to the part of our brain that controls our sleep, but we can train it by changing what we do. So . . .

Only go to bed when 'sleepy tired':

We might go to bed for all sorts of reasons – because there's nothing on telly, because everyone else in the house is going, because we've always gone to bed at 10 pm . . . but this is not helpful! If we go to bed when we are not feeling 'sleepy tired' we are not giving ourselves the best chance of sleeping.

'Sleepy tired' is not the same as exhausted, drained, or knackered; it is when we start to yawn, our eyes feel tired or itchy and our minds might feel a bit soft or fuzzy. This is the best time to go to bed because we are more likely to sleep. It is not a good idea, however, to wait even a short while past this time as we are likely to become more alert immediately after feeling sleepy (our levels of alertness vary throughout the day, and a period of feeling drowsy, is followed by a fairly rapid increase in alertness). And very importantly . . .

Only sleep in bed

If all we ever do in bed is sleep and, if we never sleep anywhere else, then the part of our brain that controls our sleep begins to learn that when we get into bed it is time to sleep. If, however, we regularly read, watch TV, make phone-calls, eat, drink and think about our day etc then, when we get into bed:



'Oh, I'm in bed – maybe I'll read ... watch TV ... phone a friend ... eat ... drink ... think ...'

If all we ever do in bed is sleep then:



'Oh, I'm in bed – must be time to sleep!'

So nothing except sleep in bed (sexual activity is the only exception – this is actually helpful for sleep). And this also means it is important to . . .

Reduce the amount of time we spend lying in bed awake:

If we have been in bed for 15 or 20 minutes and are still awake, then it is helpful to get back out of bed and go to another room. We should do something relaxing and not return to bed until we feel 'sleepy tired'. If we are still wide awake 15 or 20 minutes after returning to bed, we should repeat the above steps, and so on throughout the night until we eventually fall asleep. Also, if we wake through the night and do not fall asleep again within 15 or 20 minutes, we should do the same. And very important . . .

Sleep only in bed:

No day-time naps, no evening naps, no any-time naps – this only weakens the connection between night-time sleep and bed.

Relaxation:



being physically relaxed will not by itself make us fall asleep, but if we are relaxed we are more likely to fall asleep, as our minds will be calmer too and we will feel more comfortable.

Being able to relax our bodies is a physical skill that we can all learn. We might often think that we are relaxed – especially if we are at home, or with friends, chilling out in front of the telly or listening to music – but, if we have had a stressful day, and especially if we have had a lot of stressful days, we might actually still be very tense.

There are several ways that we can learn to relax our bodies. The simplest of these is called Progressive Muscular Relaxation Training. This technique is based on the principle that, when we deliberately tense a muscle and hold that tension, when we then let go, the muscle fibres will bounce back to a more relaxed state than they were in before we tensed the muscle. If we work our way round our bodies tensing every single muscle group, we will be making our entire bodies relax.

It is important to note that this is not something we can learn to do overnight – the training takes time. It can take many months of regular practice before we are able to relax ourselves and lose our muscular tension at will – but this will be time well-spent. Once we have acquired this skill we will always have it.

Although the CD you have been given is for use once you are in bed, it is a good idea to practise with it at other times as well – the more we practise the better we will get at relaxing . . . and the more relaxed we are, the more likely it is that we will fall asleep and sleep well.

Remember – if our bodies are relaxed, our minds will be calm!

Sleeping Pills and Other Remedies

No-one has yet developed a sleeping pill that will:

- help us to fall asleep quickly
- help us to stay asleep throughout the night
- help us to have a good natural sleep
- help us to wake up feeling refreshed in the morning
- keep on working in the longer term
- not make us become dependent on it
- not cause side effects



- when someone does, they will almost certainly become extremely wealthy!

Most current sleep medications fall down in most of these areas – they may work quite well for a short time, but then lose their effect as our bodies become used to them; even if they help us to fall asleep quite quickly, they usually change the nature of our sleep and this can leave us feeling drowsy and unrefreshed in the morning; and, if we have become dependent on them, coming off them can make our sleep problems worse. There is little evidence that they are effective for people who have long-standing insomnia, and this is why most doctors usually only prescribe sleep medication, in very limited quantities, for short-term difficulties.

If you are currently taking sleeping pills regularly, and decide to stop taking them, then it is important to consult your GP for advice on how to do this.

There is no convincing evidence for the effectiveness of the various different 'over-the-counter' sleep aids and herbal remedies that are available. Some claim that certain aromatic oils and scents can be helpful – this may be that using these products can help people to relax.

Home Practice

REMEMBER to keep filling in your sleep diary and practise your relaxation daily also!