

Sleep and why it matters.

Why is Sleep so important?

Sleep is as essential to us as breathing, eating, or drinking. It is often thought of as a time when we are inactive but in fact the opposite is true; sleep is an active and essential process which enables us to recover and regenerate. While we sleep our brains process information which helps us to learn and function effectively during the day. Good sleep is particularly important for our mental health as it also allows our brains to evaluate, remember and consolidate thoughts and memories which helps us to process emotional information.

Prioritising our sleep is a great way to support our wellbeing.

Sleep is:

- a natural behaviour.
- A lack of sleep can affect wellbeing and emotions.

Physical health:

- Hormone release occurs during sleep.
- Essential for growth and repair.

Negatives of not enough sleep

- Bad or not enough sleep for a long time can weaken your immune system, so you're less able to fight off bugs!
- The thinking and decision-making part of your brain is particularly sensitive to bad sleep or not enough sleep.
- Not getting enough sleep can make you irritable and moody and can make it easier to get frustrated. This could also have an impact on friendships or relationships at home.
- School work may seem harder, and your results may be affected.
- Poor sleep can lead to having slower reaction times affecting your ability to play some sports. For example, ability to catch a ball. Sleep helps us feel energised and more ready to cope with the day.

Three main stages of sleep cycle:

- Light sleep
- Deep sleep
- Deeper sleep or REM stage where we dream. This stage helps to restore the brain, store and retain information.

The Body Clock:

- has a circadian rhythm that helps keep it on track.
- It controls body function.
- Prompts the release of melatonin which helps us go to sleep and cortisol which helps us wake up. these chemicals are triggered by light- melatonin helps prepare for sleep and responds to darkness whereas cortisol helps us wake up and responds to light.

Amount of sleep:

- 3-4years-10 to 12 hours
- Primary age-9 to 10 hours
- Teens-8 to 9 hours
- Adults- 7 to 8 hours

Types of sleep disorder:

- Insomnia is a difficulty going to sleep and/or remaining asleep. It impacts on 10% of the population.
- Most sleep difficulties can improve with changes in sleeping habits and in the last resort- medication in the short term.

Do's and don't's:

- Having a good routine helps to regulate the body clock.
- Exercising daily
- Relaxing at least an hour before bed
- Having a dark, quiet, and comfortable bedroom
- No stimulants such as caffeine at least 6 hours before bed
- No electronics
- No big meals before bed
- Avoid napping during the day.

When to seek help:

- When behavioural changes have not helped, advise that the young person is seen by GP to check whether there might be an underlying physiological cause.

Practical Strategies

Five main principles for good sleep from the Mental Health Foundation:

1. Value sleep
2. Prioritise sleep.
3. Personalising sleep
4. Trusting that it is a natural process.
5. Psychoeducation.

Start conversations about sleep- Remember change takes time to create a new habit.

- How is your sleep- rate it from 0-10
- How does the difficulties with sleep affect you?
- What would you notice if you didn't have an issue with sleep?
- Is there anything on the list you would like to change/be better?

Strategies for dealing with unhelpful thoughts at night-time:

Negative, unhelpful thinking can trigger the release of stress hormones which impact on sleep.

- Schedule worry time.
- Start by identifying the worry thoughts during the day.
- Jot them down. Use the Worry Tree to challenging unhelpful thinking.

At night-time, do a relaxing activity such as:

- Suppressing a worry thought by repeating a word or mantra- I am calm. I am restful.
- Meditation
- Use of imagery
- Deep breathing
- Gratitude journal
- Use of brown noise

If wide awake:

- Don't force sleep.
- Get up-read a book, listen to music, practice a relaxation technique until ready for sleep.

Strategies for Parents- (refer to What to do when you dread your bed by Dawn Huebner)

- Set bedtime goals and be consistent.
- Make bedtime fun rather than a battle.
- Setting the day to rest by reflecting on successes and what went well-however small.
- Associate the bedroom as a place for sleep.
- Get the child used to sleeping on their own.
- It's time for sleep.
- Settle them in bed. Agree to check in 10 minutes.
- Minimal interaction during check-ins. If up, settle then back to bed and leave.

References:

- [Sleep :: Children and Family Health Surrey \(childrenshealthsurrey.nhs.uk\)](https://www.childrenshealthsurrey.nhs.uk/)

Additional References:

- Big Sleep Campaign
- Sleep council: <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>
- Safe space health: <https://safespacehealth.uk/healthy-lifestyle-choices/sleep/>