

SLEEP: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. How common are sleep problems?

Problems with sleep are very common. About 10-15% of patients presenting to their doctor experience significant insomnia, although more than 50% of these don't mention it. Disturbed sleep is a common symptom of depression. This may involve difficulty falling asleep, waking through the night or waking up in the early hours of the morning. In a person who has recovered from depression, any change in sleep pattern of more than two weeks can be a warning sign of relapse.

2. What should I do?

First of all make sure you tell your doctor about your problems with sleep. Secondly, the information and advice contained in this handout should help you.

3. Should I use medication?

Medications such as sleeping tablets can be useful for someone experiencing a sudden problem with falling asleep, perhaps due to an emotional crisis. However this type of medication is not recommended for more than a few days. Sleeping tablets can easily become addictive and cause long-term sleep problems. Often the person needs to take more and more of the same medication to get an effect and eventually the medication can stop working altogether. Other medications used for depression can also help with sleep problems and do not have the same addictive effect. Your doctor will advise you whether antidepressant medication is the right thing for you.

Using any medication to overcome problems falling and staying asleep should only be a short-term solution. Learning new skills to help with sleep is the best way to deal with sleep problems in the long-term.

4. Choose the right time

Sleep problems usually develop over a period of time. Slowly the person finds they can't get to sleep or they wake up often during the night. One of the most important steps in overcoming sleep problems is not to panic. You can't make yourself fall asleep. The more you try the worse things get. So the first step is to accept that for a period of time sleep will be difficult. If you think back to your teenage years you will probably remember times when you survived with very little sleep.

Trying to change your sleep habits before an important event such as an exam or meeting is not recommended. Doing so will just add extra pressure and make it more difficult to fall asleep. You may want to wait until a time where losing some sleep is not going to have serious consequences. That will allow you the opportunity to learn new sleep skills, without worrying too much about how you are going to cope the next morning. Some people find that taking a few days off work is the best way to start learning a new way of sleeping.



5. If I don't use medication, how else will I get to sleep?

The twelve steps below should help you in learning good sleep habits. Remember this is not a magic cure so don't expect miracles on the first day. If you apply these skills over a period of one to two weeks you should start seeing good results.

The 12 Commandments of Sleep

1. *Avoid taking a nap during the day*
2. *Don't go to bed too early or too late*
3. *Wait until you are tired before going to bed. If you find you don't get tired then try and go to bed no later than midnight.*
4. *Get up at the same time every morning - whether you have slept or not*
5. *Bed is for sleeping, avoid reading, listening to the radio or watching TV*
6. *Practise your breathing exercises as soon as you hit the pillow*
7. *If you can't sleep after about 30 minutes, get out of bed*
8. *Wait 15-20 minutes and go to bed again*
9. *Practise your breathing exercises again. Keep on repeating steps 7, 8 and 9 over again, for as long as it takes.*
10. *If you are disturbed by problems get up and write them down*
11. *Looking at the clock will make things worse - hide it*
12. *Don't try too hard to fall asleep - a watched pot never boils*

6. Keep a Diary

Keeping a diary of your sleep is useful. It is a handy way for you and your doctor to keep up with how your sleep is going. If you have sleep problems because of a depressive illness, after you have recovered, it is a good idea to keep an eye on your sleep patterns in the future. If you find sleep difficult for a period of two weeks or more, go back and discuss the problem with your doctor.

7. Coffee, Alcohol and Cigarettes

Caffeine and Alcohol interfere with sleep. Caffeine can keep you awake for hours.



Alcohol may help you to fall asleep but it will wake you up a few hours later and you will find it hard to fall asleep again. Also caffeine and alcohol will make you want to go to the toilet in the middle of the night.



Smoking before going to bed can also be a problem. Your body will slowly get rid of the nicotine during the night and will wake you when the level of nicotine is too low. Having another cigarette in the middle of the night will just keep the problem going.