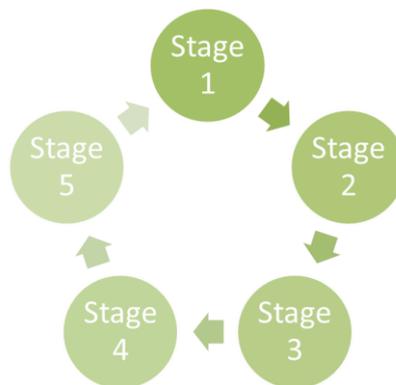


Self-Help Information

Let's Talk

Leaflet 6: Sleep Hygiene

Putting the day to rest



Leaflet 6: Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene

Sleep hygiene involves the practice of following guidelines to promote more restful and effective sleep, to increase daytime alertness and to overcome problems with sleeping at night. Sleep problems are a common feature of anxiety and depression.

There are no set rules about how much sleep people need – it varies from person to person. Whilst seven to eight hours sleep may be typical, some people need more and some less. Sleep patterns vary with age, with older people often needing less sleep than younger adults. Sleep is affected by the amount of physical activity people engage in.

Sleep problems may be caused by a number of factors:

- Medical problems, such as pain or arthritis
- Emotional problems such as stress, anxiety and depression
- Certain medicines
- Bladder problems, often affected by ageing
- Drug and alcohol use
- Environmental factors such as a noisy, light or uncomfortable bedroom

In anxiety and stress people often report difficulty in getting off to sleep. Sleep is often broken and people wake feeling un-refreshed. In depression, early-morning waking is often a problem as well as difficulty getting off to sleep. People who are depressed are often less active during the day. However, because they lack energy they may be tempted to sleep during the day, which makes it difficult to sleep well at night (see Leaflet 1: Getting Active at www.talkgether.nhs.uk for advice on how to lift depression)

The following tips are generally regarded as good advice on sleep hygiene:

- Try to establish a pattern of going to bed at the same time and getting up at a set time each day
- Avoid sleeping during the day but, if naps are taken, try to make sure that they are short
- Exercising during the day, preferably outdoors, promotes sleep
- If you have become a lot less active, gradually building up activity levels will help
- Limit use of stimulants like nicotine and caffeine, particularly in the evening before going to bed
- Avoid using alcohol excessively as its sleep-inducing effects tend to be short lived
- Try to ensure that the bedroom is quiet, cool and dark and that the mattress is comfy
- Limit stimulating activities such as exercise in the hour or so before bedtime

- Avoid going to bed too hungry or too full
- Try to do things which feel relaxing prior to bed, e.g. having a bath, taking a milky drink, listening to relaxing music
- Try to avoid worrying about getting enough sleep –try to focus on other things such as relaxing or pleasurable activities. Trying to command yourself to go to sleep is counter-productive
- If you haven't got off to sleep after half an hour or so, get up, go to a different room and participate in a quiet activity until you feel sleepy and then return to bed

Sources of useful information:

Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health NHS Trust. 2002. Sleep problems: a self-help guide. Newcastle: NTW NHS Trust.

University of Maryland Sleep Disorders Centre
http://www.umm.edu/sleep/sleep_hyg.html.