

A practical guide about:
A good night's sleep – (ENGLISH)

**Transcultural Mental
Health Centre**
A Division of the Diversity Health Institute



The aim of this booklet – ‘A Practical Guide: About A good night's sleep’ is to assist people get a better night's sleep.

The objective of the information contained within this booklet is to assist people to get a better night's sleep by:

- explaining normal age related changes.
- providing strategies for getting a better night's sleep.

This booklet is available in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, Greek, Italian and Maltese.

Other booklets available in ‘A Practical Guide’ series include:

- STRESS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT.
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A PRACTICAL GUIDE ABOUT:

A good night's sleep

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Copies of this and related booklets in the '*A Practical Guide*' series (as well as other resources) are available from the:

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Treatment Protocol Protocol (2000). Management of Mental Disorders (Third Edition). Sydney: World Health Organisation Collaboration Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

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This publication is intended to provide general information only. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional help. You may want to consider consulting your local general practitioner on issues raised in this booklet. There are also a number of telephone numbers and websites on page 9 of this booklet that you may find useful.

A good night's sleep



Sleep problems are one of the most common complaints in both the general health and mental health settings. It has been estimated that over **20%** of the **adult population** suffers from some form of lasting insomnia at some time in their lives and that sleep complaints have been found to increase significantly in the elderly.

This increase can be attributed to four main components:

- normal changes to the physiological systems controlling sleep that are part of the ageing process
- an increased incidence of specific organic sleep disorders such as periodic limb movement during sleep (PLMS) and sleep apnoea
- an increased incidence of medical conditions (e.g., osteoarthritis) and mental disorders (e.g. depression, dementia) that adversely affect sleep
- an increased use of a variety of medications that may either interact with each other, or act differently in the elderly person.





Normal age-related changes

These changes include:

- a decrease in the amount of deep sleep and an increase in the proportion of lighter sleep.
- an increase in the number of awakenings and fragmented sleep during the night.
- a perception of decreased quality and quantity of sleep.
- a decreased ability to adapt to changes or interruptions to the sleep-wake cycle.
- a tendency to fall asleep earlier and to awaken earlier.
- these normal changes usually begin around the age of 50.

How to get a better night's sleep



The following outlines good sleep habits and provide guidelines for dealing with common causes of sleep disturbance.

1. Establish a regular waking time

Establishing a regular sleep-wake pattern is very important, especially waking up at the same time each morning. The time that we wake helps to synchronise our body's circadian rhythms, so we should try not to vary the time of the day that we get up by more than one hour, even across the weekends.



2. Establish a proper sleep environment

Comfort – The discomfort caused by a rumbling stomach, persistent aches and pains, or being too hot or cold, can prevent us from relaxing enough to fall asleep. Therefore it is necessary that all our immediate needs have been met before we try to sleep.



Noise – Noise during the night (such as traffic) is another common source of sleep disturbance. Even if we do not awaken and cannot remember the noises the next day, the noises can interfere with our normal sleep pattern. If we sleep in a place that tends to be noisy, we should try to shut out sound by closing windows and doors or wearing earplugs.



Light – A light room will make it more difficult for us to sleep. If we have trouble sleeping, we should darken the room to ensure that the morning light does not wake us.

3. Allow a wind-down time prior to sleep

We should stop work at least 30 minutes before going to bed and do something different and non-stressful, such as reading, watching television, or listening to music.



4. Associating your bed with sleep

Activities such as eating, working, watching television, reading, or discussing the day's problems may make us associate our bed with wakefulness and alertness rather than drowsiness and sleep onset. If you are a person that associates wakefulness with such activities, it is advised that you refrain from engaging in such activities in bed.



5. Coping with worry and anxiety

One of the most common causes of sleep disturbance is anxiety. Many people find it difficult to wind down when they climb into bed at night after a hectic day. Often this is the first chance they have had to think about things that are concerning them. People can find themselves lying in bed worrying about their problems when they would rather be asleep.

The feelings of tension and arousal that accompany these thoughts make it more difficult to fall asleep, and people may then begin to worry about their sleeplessness as well as their other problems. If we think we are having trouble sleeping because we are anxious¹ about things that are happening in our lives, there are two things we can do to improve our sleep:

- Set ourselves a half-hour 'worrying time' before bedtime. Have a pen and paper beside us, to write down our worries and possible solutions.
- Avoiding things which upset us before we go to bed.

¹ Talk to your doctor if you think anxiety or depression could be keeping you awake at night.



6. Wait till you are sleepy

If you have problems falling asleep, consider going to bed only when you are sleepy. If you find yourself still awake and worrying after 10 minutes, get up and do something that is distracting yet relaxing, like knitting, listening to music, or reading a book. You may even want to listen to a relaxation tape. Return to bed when you feel sleepy again.

When you do go back to bed, if you find that you are still worried and sleepless, get out of bed again and do something relaxing until you are sleepy enough to return to bed once more. At first you may find you need to get out of bed a number of times before you are finally able to fall asleep. The important thing is that you will learn to associate your bed with sleep and not with worry.



7. Avoid napping during the day

It is not uncommon for people who have had a particularly bad night's sleep to feel sleepy the next day. This daytime sleepiness can make it very tempting for you to take a nap during the day. However, if you have insomnia and nap in the daytime, you make it much more likely that you will have another night of poor sleep. This is because when the time for bed comes you will be less tired and will need less sleep because you have slept during the day. You will probably take longer to fall asleep and you will awaken more frequently during the night. The next day you are likely to feel sleepy again and will be tempted to have another daytime nap.





As you can see, this pattern of napping soon becomes a vicious cycle that makes your original sleeping problem even worse. If you have insomnia, no matter how tired you are during the day, try to avoid daytime naps (unless you are doing shift work). Stick to regular sleep times by going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time every morning. If you cannot get to sleep until later than your normal sleep time, do not sleep late the next morning – get up at your normal waking time. By following these instructions you will help to ensure that your natural body rhythm works with you, helping you to asleep at the times you want to sleep.



8. **Avoid caffeine**

This drug is found in coffee, tea, cocoa, cola drinks, as well as some over-the-counter medications. Consuming caffeine before bedtime, or drinking too much caffeine during the day will increase feelings of energy and wakefulness and make it more difficult for you to fall asleep. Any caffeine consumed after about 4p.m. will have an effect by the time you go to bed.



9. **Avoid nicotine**

Nicotine stimulates the nervous system by releasing a hormone called 'adrenaline'. Adrenaline acts to arouse the body and mind, making you alert and ready for action. Smoking prior to bedtime increases energy and liveliness at the very time when you want to be relaxed and ready for sleep. So, do not smoke for at least an hour before going to bed to allow time for the stimulating effects of nicotine to wear off.



10. **Avoid excessive alcohol**

A popular belief about alcohol is that it will help you sleep if you are uptight and anxious. One or two glasses of wine in the evening may help you to relax, but regularly having several drinks in the evening causes you to get much poorer sleep overall. As the alcohol in your system is broken down by your body, you tend to awaken more frequently and you spend less time in the deeper stages of sleep. If you drink regularly you may find that you come to depend on the alcohol to reduce your anxiety and help you get to sleep.

Not only will alcohol leave you feeling unrefreshed the next morning (because you are robbed of better quality sleep), but you are likely to have rebound anxiety which will last throughout the day and make it even more difficult to sleep at night. Alcohol is not the solution to sleeping problems, so do not drink before you go to bed.



11. **Avoid sleeping pills**

The use of sleeping pills for any length of time causes as many problems as it solves. While sedative hypnotics will help you fall asleep and will decrease your anxiety in the short term, these benefits will disappear in the long term if you continue to use sedatives regularly.

Continual use of sleeping pills also has the disadvantage that it becomes increasingly difficult to stop using them because doing so will cause withdrawal effects. Coming off sleeping pills can also cause you to have vivid dreams and nightmares. If you do use sleeping pills or use them occasionally, take heed of these warnings and do not use them regularly.



If you do use sleeping pills every night to help you sleep, it is recommended that you talk to your family doctor about reducing your intake of sleeping pills over time until you can stop using the pills altogether.

12. Take a late snack.

A light bedtime snack, such as a warm glass of milk or a banana will help some people get to sleep. These foods are high in amino acid called tryptophan, which is thought to be involved in the biochemical systems that induce and maintain sleep.



In summary, in addition to the good sleep habits explained above, regular exercise during the day or early evening can improve sleeping patterns (try to avoid exercise late in the evening). And lastly, be aware of things in the environment that may interfere with your sleep (such as active pets or digital clocks that can be distracting).



Some useful telephone numbers

Local Area Health Service numbers are listed under the 'Health Depart of NSW' in the 'White Pages'.

Mental Health Association NSW Inc.

Tel: 1800 674 200

NSW Transcultural Aged Care Service

Tel: 02 8585 5000 – Develops partnerships in culturally appropriate care, provides information, advice, resources and cross cultural training to residential aged care providers.

If you are unable to speak English well, you can phone the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** on 131 450 (this is a free service) and ask them to call the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (from 8.30am to 5.00pm) on your behalf.



Transcultural Mental Health Centre

Tel: 02 9840 3800

Some useful websites

Mental Health Association NSW Inc.
www.mentalhealth.asn.au

Multicultural Communication
www.mhcshealth.nsw.gov.au

Multicultural Mental Health Australia
www.mmha.org.au

NSW Health Department
www.health.nsw.gov.au

Diversity Health Institute Clearinghouse
www.dhi.gov.au/clearinghouse

If you are interested in attending a course on any one of the 'A Practical Guide' series topic areas, phone the Transcultural Mental Health Centre on (02) 9840 3800 to register your interest.

If you live in rural and remote areas of NSW you can call the TMHC (free call) on 1800 64 8911 to register your interest.