



Sleep for Carers

What is Sleep?

It may sound obvious, but what do we really know about sleep? Circadian rhythm refers to our inner clock, which is constantly on in the background of the brain, using the hormone melatonin to run our essential cycle of wakefulness and sleep that repeats roughly every 24 hours.

Our nervous system is relatively inactive, with eyes closed, our heart rate goes down by 10 to 30 beats per minute, postural muscles relax, and consciousness is practically suspended. Sleep helps us rest but it also restores our bodies, building and repairing tissue, and producing the immune system we need to stay healthy.

We might snore because our throat muscles relax, airways narrow, and parts of the palate vibrate.

There are 4 stages of sleep, which we might cycle round 4 to 6 times every night.

Stage 1 - is when we doze off, we're not quite fully relaxed and might twitch involuntarily.

Stage 2 - breathing slows, eyes stop moving, temperature drops, muscles relax, and short bursts of brain activity help us resist being woken up, we spend about half our sleep in this state.

Stage 3 - is our deep sleep when we relax even further and it is hardest to wake us, this is a critical time for restorative sleep and there is evidence not only of physical benefits but that it also improves creativity, insightful thinking and memory.

Stage 4 - brain activity picks up to almost the same degree as when we are awake, our body experiences atonia, a temporary paralysis of the muscles, except the eyes and the muscles that control breathing. Eyes can be seen moving quickly, which is how this stage gets its name of REM or rapid eye movement sleep and is thought vital for cognitive functions like learning.

Doctors recommend we get 7-9 hours' sleep per night, however what we need depends on individuals, their age, activity levels, health, environment, and responsibilities. Caring for others can seriously affect both our ability to sleep and our ability to function well day to day.

A report on the connection between mental health and sleep suggested that sleep is as important as oxygen, food, and water. Researchers have requested bringing sleep to the forefront of the country's health agenda and called on the government to address sleep issues in wellbeing and mental health strategies.

Sleep Disorders

There are many sleep disorders from insomnia to restless legs syndrome, night terrors to sleep apnoea. Not everyone who has trouble falling asleep has insomnia but if you are worried about sleep speak to your GP.

What can help get a better night sleep?

Restful Environment

1. **Decent mattress and bed frame** – can make all the difference.

The National Bed Federation are the trade association for manufacturers and suppliers. They also run Bed Advice UK for consumers. Bed Advice UK provides professional, unbiased, generic advice on everything you need to know about beds and mattresses to help you navigate buying what you need. They have no allegiance to any specific type of product, any one brand or any bed retailer.

Website www.bedadvice.co.uk E-mail help@bedadvice.co.uk Tele: 01756 799 950

2. **Relaxing colours** – blue (calms nervous system), green (reduces stress), beige (creates balance, limits distractions), white (less distraction, allows you to relax) and pink (may lower blood pressure) <https://www.sleep.org/sleep-environment/best-colors-for-sleep/>

3. **Shut out the light** – use black out blinds or curtains that cover the whole window and are flush to the frame and walls.

4. **Noise reduction** – if you find yourself next to pipes or radiators, a neighbour who works shifts or has a newborn, if you can try and move furniture around to sleep in a quieter spot.

5. **Hearing** – if you are keeping an ear out through the night to hear the person you care for, you could try a sensor mat. These are placed under the pillow or on the floor and vibrate if your loved one has got up.

6. **Scents** – Aromatherapy suggests spraying lavender on your pillow or on a piece of cloth to help aid sleep.

Food & Drink

1. **Reduce caffeine intake** – caffeine is a stimulant and is found in tea, coffee, chocolate and energy drinks like Lucozade and Red Bull, cold and flu remedies such as Lemsip. Swap to decaf varieties.
2. **Does cheese give you nightmares?** – There is no evidence that cheese directly leads to bad dreams, but it can be difficult to digest so may keep your body busier. This and other foods that don't go down so easily for you should be avoided close to bedtime.

Relaxing

1. **Wind-down before bedtime** – Whether it is a hot drink, doing a crossword, reading, listening to music, meditating, praying, putting your worries out of your mind and onto paper or having a warm bath, aim to do at least one thing that you know really helps to relax you before going to bed.
2. **Remember to relax in the day too** – See PSPA 'Relaxation for Carers' for ideas

Technology

All light is made up of electromagnetic particles that travel in waves of different lengths. Short wavelengths have higher energy and long wavelengths lower energy. Blue light from devices is extremely high energy causing us to be more alert, suppressing melatonin and disrupting circadian rhythms.

1. **Use devices wisely** – Have a break from mobile, laptops, tablets and computers. Or if you are using a screen right up before sleeping; perhaps you may read with a Kindle, play games on a phone, type a diary entry, text people, or use online forums for example, please try switching to night light friendly settings as that should help your brain unwind and be readier to sleep. This could be called 'blue shade', 'night shift', 'bedtime' or 'dark mode' or similar and can be found in your settings area. Some newer reading-related devices may already reduce blue light as their default.
2. **Free sleep cycle recording** - Phone apps can record your sleep pattern overnight e.g. Sleep Cycle. Many of these do free trials for 7 days so you can see how your four stages of sleep are working through.

Resources

NHS

General advice page <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/>

NHS Sleep Self-Assessment

Takes a few minutes to complete <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/>

NHS Short Video What can you do about sleep problems? With Professor Colin Espie, Professor of Sleep Medicine at Oxford University <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/#video>

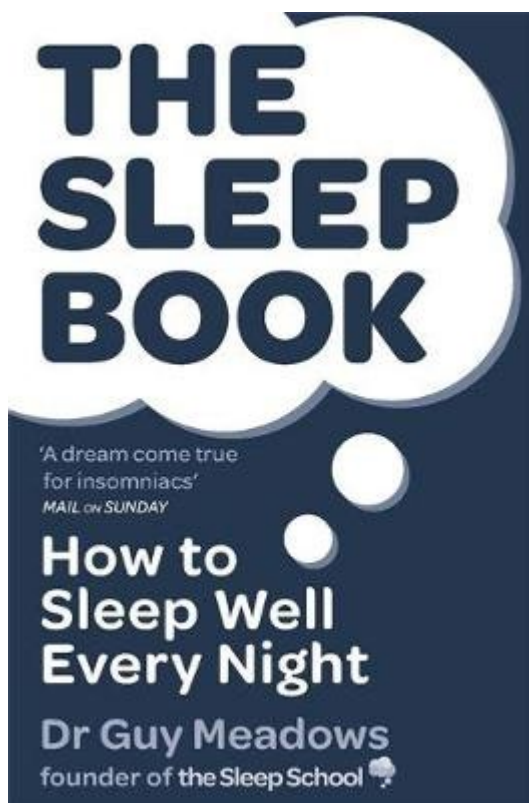
NHS Video Bedtime Meditation 30-minute step by step meditation <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/bedtime-meditation/>

Libraries

Reading Well

Reading Well initiative providing information and support for managing common health conditions or dealing with difficult feelings and experiences (including problems with sleep).

An example from their list is:



'The Sleep Book: How to Sleep Well Every Night'

Dr Guy Meadows

A third of the population sleep badly, but you don't have to be one of them. Using a blend of mindfulness and new ACT therapy techniques, the book shares a unique five-week plan to cure your sleep problem whether it's a few restless nights or a lifetime of insomnia.

The Sleep Book is the sum of a doctorate degree in sleep and well over 12,000 hours spent working with more than 2,000 insomniacs in one-to-one clinics, workshops and retreat environments

The books are available to borrow from your local library. Selected titles are also available to borrow as e-books and audiobooks. Visit your local library website to find out how to join the library and access books electronically.

<https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/mental-health>

THE SLEEP CHARITY

Empowering the nation to sleep better; provides advice, information, education and support.

Runs the **National Sleep Helpline 03303 530 541** open 7pm-9pm Monday to Thursday.

Website www.thesleepcharity.org.uk E-mail info@thesleepcharity.org.uk

DOCUMENTARY

BBC Horizon 'How to Sleep Well' 2022

With Dr Michael Mosley

Michael Mosley has struggled with his sleep for years and wants to know if the latest insights can help him and the millions like him. He discovers why cutting our sleep short can be linked to a host of illnesses, including serious diseases like Alzheimer's. Putting his own sleeping brain and body to the test, Michael signs up for two revealing experiments: wearing a new device that maps his sleep and allows scientists to see how it measures up to an ideal night, and taking part in a sleep deprivation experiment, where he is confronted by the fact that just one sleepless night impacts his cognitive performance.

Revealing the very latest science breakthroughs and packed with personal anecdotes, this programme is a useful guide to anyone looking for tips and insights on how to get the benefits from learning how to sleep well.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0015y9l>

Some Sleep Quotes

"A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow" – Charlotte Bronte.

"Your future depends on your dreams, so go to sleep." – Mesut Barazany.

"He that can take rest is better than he that can take cities" – Benjamin Franklin.

"What is without periods of rest will not endure" – Ovid.

"If you get tired, learn to rest, not to quit" – Banksy.

"Sleep is the best meditation" – Dalai Lama.

"A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book." – Irish Proverb.

"I'm trying to read a book on how to relax, but I keep falling asleep." – Jim Loy.

"The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more." – Wilson Mizener.