

Medical guidance notes and information

Sleeping tips

- Stay away from stimulants including coffee, chocolate, caffeinated sodas like cola and caffeinated teas in the hours before bedtime. These will delay sleep.
- Regular exercise can improve sleep, however you should avoid exercise in the 3 hours before bedtime as exercise is a stimulant and exercising before bedtime can leave you too energised to fall asleep.
- Don't go to bed hungry as being hungry can keep you awake. Have a light snack before bedtime. Carbohydrates like bread, cereal or a banana are good as they trigger a hormone called serotonin that makes you sleepy.
- Avoid heavy meals near bedtime. Heavy meals around bedtime can interfere with your sleep as your digestive system is working to break down your meal. Heavy fatty foods can also give you heartburn and keep you awake.
- Avoid alcohol before bedtime. Alcohol can cause you to wake up throughout the night.
- Bedtime routines can be helpful for good sleep. Routines will inform your body that it is time to wind down. Try and keep routines on your normal schedule. A cup of herbal tea an hour before bed can begin a routine.
- Avoid bright light around the house before bed as bright lights can be stimulating. Dimming down lights around the house in the hours before bedtime can be helpful. If you do not have dimmers, using smaller less bright lights can do the trick.
- If you work shifts and sleep during the day try to avoid bright light on your way home from work. It may be helpful to wear sunglasses as this will shade you from the bright morning light that usually makes you feel more alert and can make falling asleep more difficult.
- Create a calm bedroom environment. Try and ensure that your bed and bedding are as comfortable as possible.
- Keep your bedroom at comfortable temperature that suits you. Not too warm and not too cold. Cooler is better than warmer.
- Keep your bedroom dark. Blackout curtains can be helpful especially if your sleeping time is during daylight hours.
- Go to bed only when you feel tired enough to sleep. Avoid reading, watching TV or using laptop computers in bed. These are waking activities.
- Try visualising a landscape that has pleasant memories for you. This may help you to relax.
- If you don't fall asleep within 20 minutes get out of bed and go to another room. Try and relax by listening to soothing music in dim light or do something boring until you feel sleepy enough to go back to bed.
- Avoid looking at the clock if you wake up in the middle of the night. It can cause anxiety. If you find it difficult not to do so, turn the clock away from your eyes so you would have to turn it to see the time. You may decide not to make the effort and go right back to sleep.
- If you have a sleeping partner, ask them if they notice any loud snoring, leg movements and/or pauses in breathing. These symptoms are typical of a condition called sleep apnoea. If you have any concerns see your GP.

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- If you feel emotional problems or stress are causing you difficulty sleeping, having counselling or attending a stress reduction programme in Occupational Health may be helpful. You can make a self referral by contacting the Counselling and Trauma Support department directly by telephone on auto 1776 or externally on 0845 600 1776.

If you have continuous trouble falling asleep consult your GP.

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