MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2020

BETTER SLEEP

"It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved after the committee of sleep has worked on it." John Steinbeck

A good night's sleep is something that most of us take for granted. We go to bed, drift off to sleep and wake up with the alarm clock the next morning feeling refreshed and ready to face the day's challenges. Most of us do not give a second thought about how a lack of sleep would impact our performance at work, our relationships or our behaviour at home.

For those who suffer from a poor sleep pattern, each day can present many challenges which those who enjoyed a full night's sleep may not recognise. Any number of different factors can cause temporary or longer-lasting sleep problems. More than 30% of the population suffers from some form of sleep disorder.

This helpsheet will help you consider aspects of sleep problems to identify why you may be experiencing them, and what you can do to make changes to overcome them.

If you'd like to discuss any of the issues raised in this Helpsheet, the CiC 24-hour Confidential Care Adviceline is available for practical and emotional support.

Want to talk?

Get in touch with CiC using the details below:
Phone: 0800 085 1376 or +44 (0)20 7938 0963
Email: assist@cicwellbeing.co.uk
Text relay: 1800 0800 085 1376
Web: www.well-online.co.uk

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What Is Sleep & Why Do We Need It?

No-one is really sure why we sleep. The amount of energy saved when we are asleep is minuscule. But we do know that fatigue caused by lack of sleep can lead to higher blood pressure and to higher levels of cortisol being produced, which can in turn suppress the immune system. Our brain development and functioning is affected by loss of sleep. Just try staying awake for a long period and see what happens to your memory, your speech and your decision making!

Not surprisingly, there is more and more evidence suggesting a link between sleep problems and poor mental health. UK charity the Mental Health Foundation published the an extremely large survey on the nation's sleep – contacting more than five thousand people. The survey produced some interesting findings.

Compared to people who sleep well, people with insomnia are:

Four times as likely to have relationship problems s three times as likely to experience low mood and lack concentration during the day.

Twice as likely to suffer from energy deficiency

Three times as likely to struggle to get things done at work or elsewhere

The survey found that more than 30% of the population suffers from insomnia or another form of sleep disorder.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Of course, we may all experience sleep difficulties from time to time, but if your sleep is being affected over a long period, help is available.

How Much Sleep?

What is a normal amount of sleep? Unfortunately, there is no single straight forward answer to this. It is a popular misconception that we all need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Studies show that some people function well on as little as 4 hours sleep per night, and others need as much as 10.

The amount of sleep a person needs can also vary throughout his or her life. Newborn babies can sleep as much as 18 hours per day, whereas a person in their seventies might need only 5 or 6 hours. And good sleep doesn't just mean lots of sleep. The amount of sleep each of us needs varies.

In order to find a figure that works for you, try keeping a record of your sleep for a couple of weeks. Note down how many hours sleep you had each night and how you felt on the following day. This will give you some good insight into how much sleep you need.

What Causes Sleep Problems?

There are numerous reasons why our sleep can be affected. There are of course the normal effects of ageing where the amount we need to sleep changes. There may be medical reasons for disrupted sleep such as developing arthritis and some medicines can interfere with sleep.

Sleep is also affected by how we are feeling. If we are suffering from stress or suffering from a bereavement, it can have an impact on our sleep. Feeling depressed or experiencing low mood can disrupt our sleep.

There are also more practical reasons why we may be having bad sleep. People who work shifts often have difficulty sleeping, you may have an infant who is not yet sleeping through the night.

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Factors That Effect Your Sleep

Environment

How long is it since you changed your mattress? Is your room dark enough? Is it too hot or too cold? Are you kept awake by someone sleeping in the same room? Is there anything you can do to reduce disturbance and external noise? Try to avoid watching TV in bed and do something to help you relax before sleeping, such as playing soothing music

Attitude

Try not to worry too much about sleep as this may affect you in a negative way. If problems are keeping you awake, get out of bed and write down possible solutions to them. This change of scenery can really help you to fall to sleep when you return to bed. Nothing is worse than tossing and turning in bed desperately trying to sleep!

Lifestyle

Regular exercise and eating healthily can play a big part in how we sleep. Avoid caffeine at least four hours before going to bed and try not to drink alcohol before trying to sleep. It may help us fall asleep but disturbs our deep sleep. Smoking is also a stimulant. Getting into a regular routine can also help your body to know where it is. Try not to go to bed until you feel sleepy

Quick Tips To Improve Your Sleep

Having a bath before going to sleep can help to lower the body temperature which may facilitate deeper sleep. Although the bath will initially raise your body temperature, it will eventually fall to a level more conducive to better sleep.

Certain foods such as bananas and lettuce are claimed to have natural qualities that help to induce sleep.

Visualise yourself in a deep relaxing sleep and try to focus on this image when you are in bed.

Breathing exercises can help. Try simply breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Make your breaths and deep and long, focussing your thoughts on the breath. Notice the rise and fall of your chest.

Speak to your pharmacist about herbal remedies such as valerian or skull cap.

Working through the body, tense and relax your muscles a few times when you are lying in bed. Start with the muscles in the feet, then the calves etc until you have worked through all parts of your body.

Protein acts as a stimulant and carbohydrate as a relaxant. Try to avoid eating protein late at night.

Listen to some relaxing music before going to sleep. There are countless apps that help with this.

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