

Night-time relaxation routine

Breathe deeply, counting slowly up to four as you breathe in, hold for another four seconds and then breathe out slowly. Consciously tense and relax your muscles, in turn, starting at your toes and working up your body.

How to find out more

Mind

MindinfoLine: 0845 766 0163, web: www.mind.org.uk

British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association

tel: 01732 245 638, web: www.britishsnoring.co.uk

National Sleep Foundation

web: www.sleepfoundation.org

The Sleep Council

helpline: 0845 058 4595, web: www.sleepcouncil.com

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy

tel: 020 7014 9955, web: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Further reading from Mind Mail Order

For a Mind *Publications catalogue*, send an SAE to Mind Mail Order at the address below.

How to cope with sleep problems (Mind 2005) £1

How to stop worrying (Mind 2006) £1

The kitchen shrink: foods and recipes for a healthy mind N. Savona (DBP 2003) £10.99

Learn to sleep well C. Idzikowski (DBP 2000) £9.99; also available with an audio CD for £20

Making sense of sleeping pills (Mind 2005) £1

The Mind guide to relaxation (Mind 2006) £1



For better
mental health

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Mind troubleshooters: sleep problems



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A fold out factfile

People may worry about not getting enough sleep, but worrying only makes it worse. It's easy to overestimate how much sleep you need, or not to realise it's normal to wake briefly each night. The occasional bad patch is harmless and usually rights itself. It's only of concern if it's been going on longer than a month.

- The average amount of sleep is seven or eight hours a night, but we all need different amounts, and less and less as we get older.
- We pass through cycles of light and deep sleep at night. Every 90 minutes comes a period of dream sleep (REM), which is vital for our wellbeing.
- Sometimes we incur a 'sleep debit', making us tired and irritable, unable to concentrate or to function properly. It stops once the debt is paid off.
- Long-term sleep problem may cause physical or mental health problems.

Things that may disrupt your sleep pattern

- snoring that interferes with breathing
- too much stress
- ill-health or physical pain
- emotional difficulties, including anxiety and depression
- jet lag or shift work that disrupts our internal body clock
- traumatic events, such as a divorce, redundancy, or bereavement
- going into hospital, a residential home or a hotel
- medicines, such as water pills, steroids, beta-blockers, and some painkillers, antidepressants, slimming tablets and cold remedies
- withdrawing from certain drugs, such as tranquillisers or antidepressants
- taking street drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine and amphetamines
- overusing alcohol, tobacco and caffeine

Ten tips to help you sleep



- Establish a regular routine. Go to bed only when you're tired and get up at the same time each day. Avoid napping during the day.
- Check your sleeping arrangements. Think about comfort, temperature, light and noise levels.
- Learn to de-stress before bed. Dismiss nagging thoughts by writing them down. Have a warm bath, practise a relaxation technique, or listen to a relaxation tape. (But don't read or watch television in bed.)
- Don't eat late. Avoid rich, spicy or sugar-rich foods, red meat and cheese. Choosing wholemeal, low-fat, magnesium-rich foods (green salads, broccoli, nuts and seeds) may encourage sleep, as may drinking hot milk and honey.
- Get enough exercise. Fit people sleep better.
- Don't stay in bed. If you can't sleep, get up after 20 minutes and go through your relaxation routine again.
- Try out complementary remedies. Yoga, meditation, homeopathy or herbal remedies, such as lavender or valerian, may help.
- Keep a sleep diary. This helps you identify potential causes for your sleeplessness.
- Use strategies. Try some reverse psychology: keep your eyes open and tell yourself to resist sleep. Interrupt unwanted thoughts: repeat a soothing word to yourself. Visualise a scene or landscape that has pleasant memories for you.
- Talk to your GP. Sleeping pills present problems, but a brief course is sometimes appropriate. Ask about talking treatments, such as CBT, or referral to a sleep laboratory.

