

# Sleep Problems

## Understanding sleep related problems...

Some facts about sleep:

- Sleep problems are common and affect large numbers of people.
- There is a wide normal healthy sleep range – some people sleep only 4 to 6 hours a day, while others sleep for 10 or 12. Both these are quite normal.
- The amount of sleep you need varies throughout your life. Babies and young children need a lot more sleep than older adults. People in their 60s and 70s may find that the amount of sleep they need has dropped by several hours a night.
- Many people have problems sleeping from time to time – this is called insomnia.
- Insomnia often starts after an upsetting life event, or can be caused by a person's lifestyle.
- Feelings such as anger, guilt, depression, anxiety and problems with work and relationships can also cause insomnia.
- Worry about not sleeping, or about being too tired to cope next day, can make insomnia worse.

A 'Five Areas' assessment of your sleep problem

### 1. 'THE OUTSIDE WORLD'

Can you change your bedroom to help you sleep better?

- Try changing the temperature (it might be too hot or too cold for you)
- If your room is very light (from streetlights), you could try thicker curtains or blinds.
- If you have a TV or computer in your room, try taking them out – they may be tempting you to stay awake.

### 2. THOUGHTS / IMAGES

Are worries and anxious thoughts stopping you sleeping?

- To be able to drop off to sleep, your body and brain need to relax...  
Try writing down your worrying thoughts before you go to bed. Tell yourself you will tackle them in the morning and that a good sleep will give you the energy to sort things out.

### 3. PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms such as pain, cramp or itching can stop you sleeping...  
Try to tackle these – see a doctor if necessary.

## Sleeping Problems

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### 4. FEELINGS & MOODS

- Anxious feelings can make you fidgety and restless. You may feel your heart pounding, stomach butterflies and tense muscles. All these symptoms can keep you awake.
- Depression is a common cause of sleeplessness. If you are depressed, it may take you some time to get to sleep, and you may wake earlier than normal feeling stressed and on edge. Getting treatment for depression or anxiety can help you to sleep better. Talk to your guide if you are feeling anxious or depressed.

### 5. BEHAVIOUR

Prepare yourself for sleep...

- Build in a wind-down time before you go to bed.
- Bear in mind that exercising, or eating a large meal, just before bedtime can keep you awake.
- Some people read or watch TV in bed to help them wind down. Check whether this isn't making you more alert and making your sleep problem worse.
- What about caffeine? Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, cola drinks, chocolate and some herbal drinks. It makes you more alert and is addictive. Caffeine stays in the body for several hours, so avoid caffeine drinks before you go to bed as they will keep you awake. And try to cut down on caffeine drinks during the day.
- What about alcohol? People sometimes drink alcohol to help them relax and go to sleep. However, if you drink more than the recommended sensible levels of alcohol, this will make your sleep problems worse.
- What about your sleep pattern? If you don't sleep well, it can be tempting to go to bed earlier or later than normal, or to have naps in the day. This will disturb your sleep pattern, so try to go to bed and get up around the same time each day.

The 'Golden Rule'

- ➔ If you can't sleep after 20 minutes, get up... Go out of your bedroom and do something else until you feel sleepy again.
- ➔ Then go back to bed. Keep doing this until you go to sleep.
- ➔ TRY NOT TO WORRY about how much sleep you are getting – that will only make things worse.

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