



THE COACH
APPROACH

SLEEP ISSUES - SELF HELP GUIDE

Everyone has a bad night occasionally, where they just can't seem to switch their brain off and get to sleep, or where they keep waking up and don't feel rested the day after. The occasional night like that, though frustrating at the time, won't do you any harm, but if your sleep is disrupted over the long term, it can have both physical and mental effects on your wellbeing.

The good news is that your doctor can help, and there are some things you can do yourself that might get you into the land of nod and help you stay there.

This guide will walk you through the issues that sleep problems can cause, look at how your doctor can help you and show you some of the things you can do for yourself.

What are sleep issues, and how can they affect you?

Insomnia is a very common sleep disorder where someone either has difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep through the night, or both.

Most adults will need around eight hours of sleep each night. Problems start when you consistently get less than that as sleep is necessary to repair tissue, grow muscles, synthesize hormones and process everything we've experienced during the day.

Getting a good night's sleep can boost your immune system and your mental wellbeing.

Conversely, lack of sleep over the long term can disrupt your immune system, cause weight gain, lower your sex drive, decrease fertility, put a strain on your heart and lead to depression and anxiety.

We've all experienced feeling over tired and irritable the day after a bad night, and if you haven't had enough sleep, you might struggle to get through work, feel anxious and be unable to brush away any irrational thoughts and worries.

Lack of sleep can also affect psychotic or bipolar disorders by making symptoms worse or by triggering paranoia or psychosis.

If you often have problems sleeping, speak to your doctor as they may be able to help.

Treatment methods

While you can buy over the counter sleeping tablets and herbal medicines, you shouldn't use these long term; they may also make you feel very drowsy the next day. If you have insomnia, speak to your doctor, rather than trying to treat yourself.

Your doctor will try to get to the causes of your insomnia and to treat those as well. He or she will discuss any physical problems or pain you might have that could be keeping you awake, and also look at stress and any other problems that might be taking you out of your normal sleep pattern.

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Your GP might recommend Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which can help you change the way you think and help you manage any anxious thoughts, or they might decide to give you medication to help you back into a natural sleep pattern. Medication can make you feel very tired and irritable after taking it and it loses its effect very quickly. Tablets are also addictive, and if you have been taking them for a while, you may need to taper the dose off over time after talking to your doctor.

You might also be referred to a sleep clinic to have your sleep problems assessed. This is available on the NHS, but has to be done by a doctor's referral.

Solution focused clinical hypnotherapy is an excellent way to treat sleep problems so your doctor may recommend some sessions to help you get back into your routine.

Hypnotherapy can reduce anxiety and depression, and help with pain, which will help you sleep better. The therapy sessions will also help you to relax at night, and you'll come out of your sessions feeling a lot calmer.

Self-help

You'll probably have heard a lot of advice over time if insomnia is a long-standing problem for you, from switching to decaff to visualising, but there is no 'one size fits all' solution to this. It's a case of experimenting to find out what works for you.

1. Relax before bed time

If you're working right up to the last minute before you go to bed and focusing on your worries and problems, it's highly unlikely you'll get to sleep straight away.

Stop work at least a couple of hours before bed and, even if it's tempting to keep mentally going over and over your to do list and the problems you have, try to put everything away until the morning and do something else that will help you relax and wind down, ready for sleep.

If you really can't leave everything alone because too many thoughts are running around in your head, make a list of everything you need to do tomorrow so you don't have to keep remembering it, and try journaling your thoughts and getting your worries and possible solutions out on to paper to empty your mind as much as possible before you try to sleep.

Step away from the computer screen at least an hour before you go to bed as the light from a computer or tablet can affect your chances of sleeping. Instead find the things that relax you and do those instead – read a book, listen to calming music, have a relaxing bath with aromatherapy candles and bath oils.

Learn some breathing exercises to help you relax. Try breathing in slowly and deeply, and then out, but breath out for longer than you breathe in. This should make you feel relaxed. If you do this lying down in bed, you may relax enough to fall asleep.

Try lying down in bed and then tensing all of your muscles in your body one after the other and then relaxing them, starting at your toes.

You may also benefit from learning meditation and yoga.

2. Routine

When they can't sleep, people often get into a routine of staying in bed the day after to try and catch up, but that can lead to staying up late again the night after and then having trouble sleeping again.

The best way to do this is to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day to train your brain and your body that

it's time to sleep. You should only go to bed when you are definitely tired enough to sleep, and even if it's late when that happens, you should still get up at the same time. If you do this, you will find you spend less time in your bed, but you'll spend more of your time asleep.

That will take some getting used to and it might be frustrating at first but persevere with it.

3. Take a look at where you sleep

Your room and your bed should be comfortable and relaxing, with no loud colours and flashing lights. Most people tend to find that a fully dark, quiet and cool room will help them sleep, but you'll have to see what works for you. You may prefer to have background noise, such as waves or rain, rather than silence, for example.

Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable and support your body properly.

Don't use your bedroom for anything other than sleep – no watching television or working on your laptop.

4. Cut out caffeine

Not altogether! No-one expects you to live without your morning cup of coffee, but caffeine is a stimulant, so switch to decaf or fruit teas by mid-afternoon to allow the caffeine time to exit your body.

5. Exercise

Don't exercise in the last couple of hours before bed as that can disrupt your sleep pattern, but regular exercise will not only get you fit, but it will make you more physically tired and relaxed, allowing your body to prepare for sleep.

Conclusion

It is frustrating when you can't sleep, but there are practical steps you can take that should make a difference, and your doctor will take the time to listen to you if you need further help.

If you'd like to find out more about solution focused clinical hypnotherapy and how it can help with sleep issues, please do give me a call or use the booking button on my website. Nothing will happen in our sessions that you aren't comfortable with, and hypnotherapy cannot force you to do things against your will. Just come along to my facility in the beautiful town of Falmouth in Cornwall, and you'll soon find yourself relaxing.

Disclaimer

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