

WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Sleeping well

Tips to improve sleep



Welcome

The Workplace Wellbeing offer is a free, confidential package of support inclusive to all UHBW colleagues, whenever helpful.

Full details can be found on our website. Access using [this link](#) or by scanning the QR code.



This guide and other topics in the series are intended to provide general information only with signposts to expert sources of support. If you have any questions or suggestions, please email the Workplace Wellbeing team via wellbeing@uhbw.nhs.uk

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Introduction

Sleep quality can impact physical and psychological wellbeing. According to the Sleep Council as many as 1 in 5 people experience poor sleep which may effect:

- **Mood** - we may be irritable with less patience and empathy. In the workplace, this can affect team-working and/or patient or client care.
- **Thinking and decision-making abilities** - we might have fewer coping strategies particularly when unexpected things happen.

There are links associated with **long-term poor sleep** with risk of health issues such as anxiety, depression, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's disease.

Working within health and care may impact sleep, especially those working long **shifts** or at varying times. Sometimes, we may hold on to **workplace stressors** after we have left work and so it is helpful to consider the **quality of our sleep** with manageable steps we can take to boost our physical and psychological wellbeing.

Signs and symptoms of poor sleep

We don't always recognise signs that our sleep may need attention. Taking a moment to consider common symptoms is a positive personal wellbeing tool.

The illustration on page 3 is extracted from Business in the Community, 'Sleep and Recovery Toolkit for Employers'. It is not an exhaustive list and you may experience different symptoms.

Download the [Sleep and Recovery toolkit for Employers](#) - supported by Public Health England here.





The importance of routine

Sleep is fragile. Once our sleep routine has been disrupted, it can take time to get it back to usual. For this reason an effective strategy is to stick to a set routine.

For example, if we don't get to sleep one night until 2am, it is better to still wake up at your usual time. If we were to stay in bed, our sleep pattern will likely change and become out of sync, which then takes time to get back on track.

So wherever possible, try to keep regular sleeping hours so as not to disrupt your internal body clock.



The different stages of sleep

There are several stages of sleep divided into REM sleep and non-REM sleep.

- REM stands for **Rapid Eye Movement**, where most dreaming takes place.
- Non-REM sleep is deeper and is divided into levels of depth.

Throughout an average period of sleep, we move between these stage's multiple times. The stage of sleep can impact things like napping (see page 7.)

To learn about the science of sleep and sleep management, check out the titles available in the Trust Library more **[through the link here.](#)**

How much sleep do I actually need?

Contrary to popular belief, there is no "fixed amount of sleep" to benefit every person. Age, health and personal circumstances all affect how much sleep we need, plus some people naturally sleep more than others. It is not uncommon to worry about not getting a specific amount.

General guidance suggests between 7-9 hours a night though the amount we need may change over the course of our lives.

For example, when we are children we need more sleep, and as we get older we need less, but it's good to aim for roughly 8 hours.

Take the [NHS Sleep Assessment](#) - a short test to give you a 'sleep score' and let you know when to see a GP.

It also includes practical tips and advice for improving your sleep - find out more by following the link below:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/>



What can affect the quality of our sleep?

We need to know what is affecting our sleep in order to improve it. A useful approach is to categorise it into four factors.

Factors	Examples
Environmental	Bed comfort, bedroom light and temperature, noise from neighbours, children waking us early, partner snoring.
Behaviours (our actions)	Drinking caffeine before bed, being on our phone or watching TV in bed, taking certain medications, smoking, working shift patterns & night shifts, exercising too close to bedtime.
Thoughts	Worrying about the next day, planning, thinking back over things we said and did during the day.
Physical feelings	Needing the toilet, physical tension, pregnancy, menopause, physical illness (e.g. hayfever, COPD, arthritis, sleep disorders such as insomnia), and musculoskeletal issues (e.g. back pain).

Physical feelings: e.g. pain/illness

Prolonged physical pain or illness should be discussed with your GP.

Behaviour

Some behaviours (i.e. things that we do) can prevent good sleep, such as:

- **Alcohol:** Whilst alcohol can help us to fall asleep, it affects our sleep quality resulting in more broken and less deep sleep
- **Electronic devices:** Using electronic devices such as phones and TV exposes us to blue light, which makes us biochemically less sleepy, so you may wish to avoid these for 30-60mins before bedtime. They also stimulate our minds and so you may wish to charge your phones away from the bedroom to reduce the temptation!
- **Activity:** Whilst well-timed activity can tire us out and help us sleep, activity right before bed may cause difficulties in 'switching off'. Associating bed with activities such as work, gaming, films, etc can be unhelpful.

- **Other stimulants**

Smoking may be regarded as a relaxing habit however as a stimulant, it can add to feeling 'awake' when trying to settle before sleep.

Caffeine is a drug. It has different degrees of effect - on average half of it is left in our system 6 hours after we've consumed it and a quarter of is left after 12 hours.

- Caffeine can make us feel more awake by delaying our tiredness. However, we tend to feel more tired when it wears off and then tend to drink more to help with the resulting fatigue.
- Caffeine can lessen quality of sleep.. Typically, the earlier in the day you consume it, the better in terms of achieving good sleep.

Different issues with sleep

There are many different disorders associated connected with sleep. Common disorders include insomnia and sleep apnoea.

If you would like to learn more about these conditions, see the NHS webpage link below:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/>

If you are concerned that you may have a sleep disorder, prioritise your wellbeing and book an appointment with your GP to discuss it.



What can help with sleep

What can help with sleep: Taking breaks

Most of us feel happier and function better when we are well rested. A factor of working in the NHS is that it never stops, and life at UHBW is no different.

Good sleep, combined with well-timed rests and breaks during our shifts is essential to ensure that we function well. When we are tired or feeling fatigued, we may not be able to make decisions clearly which can lead to mistakes.

Unfortunately, taking a break in the workplace can be tricky for a number of reasons, even when we might recognise we need them. We may 'push through' our body telling us it needs a rest either because of our own desire to work hard, or because we feel a pressure from those around us. The reality is that the busier it is, the more important it is to take breaks and recharge.

Find out more about the importance of taking a break in the UHBW wellbeing guide ['Switching off from work'](#).

What can help with sleep: Napping

This really is down to each person's preference. Some of us find napping a helpful strategy, whilst others say it makes them feel worse.

Power-naps can improve our brain functioning and performance, with optimum time suggested to be 15-20 minutes only, to prevent sinking into an even deeper sleep which can leave you feeling disorientated and groggy when woken.

Even lying down for 15-20 minutes without sleep can be helpful. Napping doesn't work for everyone but it can be worth trying it out. It could be beneficial to speak in your teams about attitudes to napping to ensure people feel able to do this in the workplace.

What can help with sleep: when working nights

There is no denying that working night shifts makes achieving a good sleep pattern a lot harder. It is recognised that night-shift workers typically have less sleep, and poorer quality sleep.

Night shifts have approx. 25-30% higher risk of injury than day shifts (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health). If you work night shifts, there are steps to take to reduce any negative impact on your sleep.

- Take an afternoon nap the day you start to build up your sleep store.
- Keep hydrated and eat healthily overnight to avoid swings in your blood sugar which are more extreme overnight.
- Have a power-nap on your night shifts.
- Use caffeine sparingly.
- Wear sunglasses the next morning to help your brain fall asleep.
- Have breakfast 30 mins before you fall asleep to stay full whilst you sleep.
- Get to bed as early as possible.

- Use blackout blinds.
- Don't use sedatives/antihistamines as this lessens the quality of sleep.
- Keep your bedroom cool, perhaps investing in a fan.
- Get plenty of sunlight when you get up to help your brain wake itself up.
- After the last shift have a morning nap then try to return to your normal bedtime routine.

Sleep diary

Using a **sleep diary** can help to identify reasons why sleep may be poor, and to learn helpful ideas to improve your chances of sleeping well. **Access a printable daily sleep diary [here](#).**

Once you have completed the sleep diary for 1 week, you will have a lot of rich information to help you consider these questions:

- **What did I notice from my sleep diary?** *E.g. are there any patterns I can see, such as my sleep was worse on days when I spent more time in bed on my phone?*
- **What can I do to change this?** *E.g. Looking at the tips in this guide, is there anything different you can try to see if it has a positive impact on your sleep?*

When considering what changes, it may be helpful to refer back to the four factors on page 5 (environmental, thoughts, behaviours, and physical feelings). Improving your sleep is often a case of trying different ideas rather than simply changing one thing.

Ideas for improving sleep - summary

Sleep can be affected by different things in our lives, and can be improved by taking different steps. Below are some general tips which health professionals recommend to support having positive sleep.

- Routine - going to bed and waking up the same time every day where possible.
- **Be active regularly during the day but try not right before going to bed.**
- Wind down and relax an hour before bed – e.g. have a bath or read a book.
- **Dark bedroom - use black-out blinds, or simply an eye mask and ear plugs.**
- Make sure the mattress, pillows and covers are all comfortable for you.
- **Make the bedroom a relaxing environment without stimulating from TV, computer games etc. Keep it for sleep and sexual activity only.**
- Write 'to do' lists for the next day to organise thoughts and clear the mind.

- **Don't smoke, or drink alcohol, tea or coffee in the build up to going to bed.**
- Don't sleep in or have lie-ins after a bad night's sleep – keep to your routine.
- **Try not to over-think your sleep as this may cause added stress.**
- If you've been lying in bed trying to sleep for 20 minutes+, get up and go and do something different for 15 minutes, before returning to try again. Staying in bed can form an unhelpful association between bed and being awake.

Further support

NHS Insomnia information and self-assessment:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/>

Health Assured Sleep Resources::

Health Assured offer in-the-moment support to all UHBW colleagues 24/7 via freephone 0800 028 0199. Colleagues can also access the Health Assured sleep tracker and 4-week sleep programmes via Wisdom - the Health Assured App, using this link: <https://wisdom.healthassured.org/login>

Your local GP:

If you are concerned about the amount and quality of sleep and its effects, do speak to your GP, who will be able to help, guide and support.

British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association:

The British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to helping snorers and their bed partners improve their sleep. Website: <https://britishsnoring.co.uk/>

Contact information

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