# Sleep - self help

There are many reasons for not sleeping well which may include distress, physical discomfort or physical illness.

Sleep needs vary. A baby starts life needing 16 hours or so of sleep each day, and the time we need for sleep decreases as we get older, so that adults, and particularly older adults may only need 4-6 hours a night. People's needs vary, but most people feel they need 7-8 hours, whilst others feel they need 9-10 hours a night.

We might have difficulty getting off to sleep, wake up frequently during the night, or wake early in the morning and not be able to get back to sleep. These all result in our feeling that we haven't slept enough - we feel tired, tense and are likely to worry about not sleeping. This worry can then make it even harder for us to sleep well.
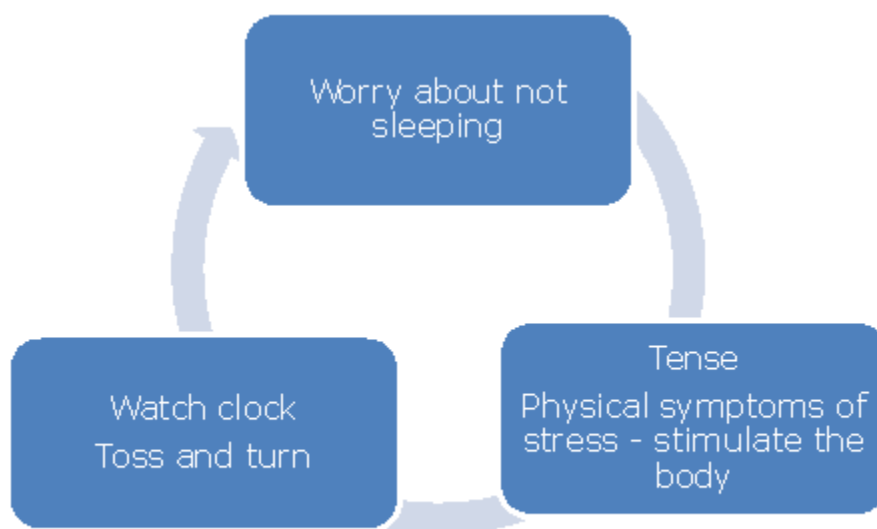


If you have trouble sleeping, there are some things you can do to help yourself get a good night's rest. These include making changes in:

- Our environment
- Our behaviour
- Our thinking

## Change our Environment

Are there any helpful changes you can make?

- Bedroom too light (or dark)

- Bedroom too hot or too cold

- Bedroom too noisy

- Bed too uncomfortable

- Partner keeping you awake? (snoring, restless etc)

## Change our Behaviour

- Use your choice of relaxation technique before going to bed (whatever works for you) *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/relax.htm)*
- Don't go without sleep for a long time – keep to a regular pattern of going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, whether you are tired or not
- Keep bed for sleep and sex.  Don't use it for watching television, using computer etc.
- Get some regular exercise during the day.  Try some regular swimming or walking.  Avoid exercise late in the evening.
- Cut down on caffeine (tea, coffee, some soft drinks)  in the evening.  Try a milky drink instead.
- Don't drink a lot of alcohol.  It may help you fall asleep, but you will almost certainly wake up during the night.
- Don't eat or drink a lot late at night.  Try to have your evening meal early rather than late.
- If you've had a bad night, resist the temptation to sleep the next day – it will make it harder to get off to sleep the following night.
- If something is troubling you and there is nothing you can do about it right away, try writing it down before going to bed and then tell yourself to deal with it tomorrow.
- If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it.  Get up and do something you find relaxing like reading or listening to quiet music.  After a while you should feel tired enough to go to bed again.  *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/music.htm)*
- Keep a sleep diary for a week (http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/ccount/click.php?id=42).  When complete, you can look back and notice what helps you sleep better and what doesn't, so you can make positive changes and do more of what helps, and less of what doesn't.  If nothing seemed to help, try something different.
- Speak to your doctor about your medication and how that might be affecting your sleep.
- Avoid clock watching when in bed - put your attention somewhere restful, use imagery *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/imagery.htm),* mindful breathing *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm)*, or your relaxation technique *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/relax.htm)*

## Change our Thinking

- Worrying about not sleeping will keep you awake!  Rather than put your focus of attention on the worrying thoughts, notice that they are just thoughts, then put your attention somewhere restful, use imagery, mindful breathing, or your relaxation technique.  *(website addresses in previous paragraph)*
- Distract yourself by thinking about a random sequence of objects for a few seconds each.  E.g. a table, a tree, a saucepan, a flower, a cow, a cloud etc.  Or you could think about a few items beginning with the letter "B", then move on through the alphabet.
- Tell yourself that worrying about it will not help, and that you probably are getting enough, just less than you think you need.  Our needs change as we get older.
- If you're worrying about a particular problem, write it down, and tell yourself you can sort it in the morning.