

Sleep Hygiene information sheet

51% of adults in a global survey were found to be getting less sleep than they need (Global Relaxation Report, 2018).

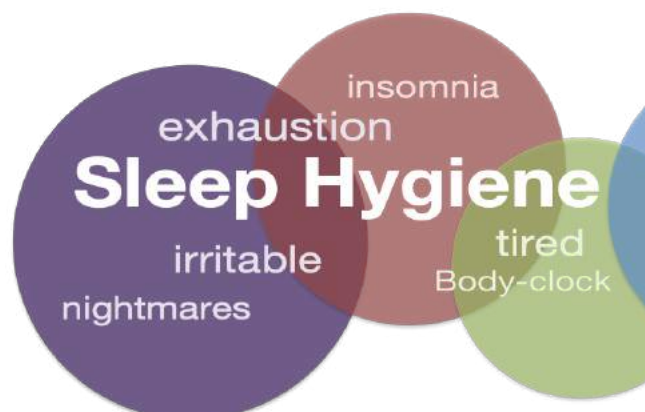
The importance of sleep & what is Sleep Hygiene?

- The amount and quality of sleep we get contributes significantly to our overall sense of physical and mental wellbeing. If we're not sleeping well, we may find ourselves feeling tired, run-down, irritable and performing 'under par'. It can therefore affect our work and relationships.
- Sleep hygiene is a term used to describe a range of ways of promoting good sleep. This might include implementing new habits and routines to prepare our bodies and minds for a good night's sleep and ensuring the environment in which we sleep is set up to support our rest.

What are common features of sleep disturbance?

- It's normal to occasionally struggle with sleep. Disrupted sleep can be a natural response to feeling anxious or emotionally overwhelmed, for example, when experiencing work or study related stress, or following a bereavement or relationship breakdown. It can also occur when our general routines are disrupted, such as after travelling or moving home. Sometimes, though, sleep disturbance can be a feature of longer-term mental health difficulties such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Most people will encounter sleep difficulties at some point in their lives.



- **Stress often contributes to difficulties with sleep.** Awareness of the impact sleep disturbance is having on our lives can leave us feeling anxious and under pressure about sleeping well, thus creating a 'vicious cycle' where worrying about not getting good enough sleep can make it even harder to achieve.
- **Sleep disturbances vary.** They may be characterised by having difficulty getting to sleep ('tossing and turning' at night) or by waking further into the night and finding it hard to get back to sleep. This is often referred to as insomnia. Nightmares or night-terrors may be another facet of sleep disturbance, particularly after experiencing a traumatic event.
- **Sleep needs vary.** It is commonly thought that eight hours is the optimum amount of sleep per night for adults. However, this can differ for individuals. Our sleep needs change throughout our lifetimes, depending on our circumstances – for example, children, teenagers and women in early pregnancy may need more sleep and older adults less. You will probably be the best judge of whether you are getting enough sleep, depending how rested and you feel each morning and how much energy you have to get through the day.

Self-help tips for maintaining good Sleep Hygiene

- **Regular routine.** Try to create regular routines with your sleep, aiming to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Whilst late nights and lie-ins at the weekend may have their appeal, they are likely to disrupt your body-clock and natural sleep patterns. The same can generally be said for naps or dozing off in front of the TV.
- **Food, drink and alcohol.** Close to bedtime, try to avoid food, drink or other stimulants that may interfere with your sleep. This is likely to mean steering clear of caffeine from the afternoon onwards and making sure you leave at least two hours between eating a substantial meal and going to bed, so your body has time to digest it properly. A milky or warm non-caffeinated drink in the evening can help soothe your system and draw blood from your brain towards your gut, creating a natural feeling of drowsiness. However, although alcohol may seem to have a similar effect, it is best avoided as it can disturb sleep patterns and prompt you to wake up again further into the night.
- **Exercise and sleep.** Getting some daily exercise will help you feel physically ready to sleep at night, although it's best to do strenuous exercise earlier in the day as it may leave you feeling overstimulated too close to bedtime. Gentler exercise such as stretching or certain forms of yoga are more suitable in the evening. Outdoor exercise is ideal during the daytime as exposure to natural daylight supports our circadian rhythm (natural sleep-wake cycle).
- **Create a relaxing evening routine.** Give yourself plenty of time (ideally an hour) to wind down at the end of each day before going to bed, putting work to one side, and avoiding calls, e-mails or exposure to 'bluelight' on screens, or anything else that might overstimulate you or prompt worry and anxiety. This may include not watching the news, dramatic or violent films and TV shows, or engaging with social media if these things tend to leave you feeling 'activated'. Reading a novel or listening to music may be preferable.
- **Seek to manage your worries.** If worries or concerns stay on your mind as evening comes, writing them down can help, as can reminding yourself that you will address them tomorrow. Quiet time before bed also creates the opportunity to gently prepare for the day ahead (laying out your clothes, making your packed lunch etc.), particularly if you have the tendency to feel rushed in the morning, or stressed at night about preparations for the following day.
- **Consider your sleeping environment.** Aim to make your bedroom a calm space which is an optimum temperature when you go to bed, as feeling too hot or cold will impede your sleep. Dimming the lights, and perhaps lighting candles instead (just be sure to blow them out before you sleep!) can create a relaxing ambiance as night falls, again, supporting your circadian rhythm. Heavy curtains and good sound insulation will also prevent light or sound disturbing you.
- **Boundaries around your bedroom.** Try only to use your bedroom for sleep, sex and getting dressed to avoid you associating it with other activities. If (for example, during lockdown, because you live in a shared home) you must use your bedroom for work or other tasks during the day, be sure to clear away and wind down from these things before bedtime.

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- **Further support.** If sleep problems persist, and start to affect your work, relationships and general sense of wellbeing, consider speaking to your doctor or medical advisor who may be able to suggest some treatment options. Medication may help in terms of short-term relief from sleep difficulties. If you feel your sleep problems may be linked to stress, trauma, difficult life events or other psychological issues, then counselling may help in the longer term.

Professional resources for sleep hygiene & further information for those with sleep disturbance

- NHS www.nhs.uk main website features information on insomnia including an online self-assessment for sleep difficulties.
- The Sleep Charity www.thesleepcharity.org.uk is the UK's main sleep charity offering information and advice around sleep as well as training and resources for individuals and professionals.
- The Sleep Foundation www.sleepfoundation.org is a US site with comprehensive information on sleep disorders, sleep hygiene and the latest research into sleep.

FD Consultants

Individual support

At FD Consultants we can help individuals improve sleep hygiene and wellbeing. We are a network of accredited therapists. We specialise in stress, anxiety, depression, burnout and trauma care.

Organisational support

For organisations looking for employee psychological support, FD Consultants are the well-being service who will best deliver a reliable, quick, and bespoke support system in the workplace. FD Consultant's team of accredited specialists will offer ongoing support to help manage stress, prevent burnout and provide specialist trauma care where required, enabling your staff with the tools to cope, and recover more quickly.