

Improving Sleep

Improving the quality of your sleep is more about what you do when you are awake than when you are asleep!

While you are awake:

When you wake up:

- Get out of bed as soon as you wake up - do not go back to sleep or try to make up for 'lost sleep';
- Try to get up at about the same time each morning, approximately 7:00-7.30am;
- Go outside into the sun (no sunglasses!); and,
- Do some physical activity, like walking to get the newspaper.
- During the day:
 - Do not nap. If you nap, you will be less tired when you go to bed, and will probably take longer to fall asleep;
 - If you are worrying about things during the night, set aside some time for problem solving during the day. Identify problems that are causing you stress and solve them using structured problem solving;
- Track your sleep-wake patterns on a Mood Diary; add in any relevant bits of information'
- Review your sleep-wake progress with your doctor or therapist at each visit; and,
- Try to be active in the early morning or late afternoon - it helps to set your body's daily clock.

Late afternoon:

- Avoid drinking caffeine after about 4:00pm, and try not to drink more than two cups of caffeine type drinks each day (e.g. coffee, strong tea, cola); and,
- Be active while the sun is up.
- Regular exercise can improve your sleep, but avoid vigorous exercise late in the evening;

Before going to bed:

- Go to bed at approximately 10:00-10:30pm (Avoid going to bed too early - it is not the right time for deep sleep)
- Avoid using alcohol to help you sleep (As the alcohol is broken down in your body, it causes you to sleep less deeply and to awaken more frequently)
- Do not smoke within an hour or two of going to bed (Smoking stimulates your nervous system)
- Avoid taking sleeping pills. If you do need to take sleeping pills, try not to take them for longer than a week because they can be addictive.
- Do not go to bed hungry or with a full bladder;
- Allow yourself time to wind down before going to bed for 30 minutes
- Use your bed only for sleep and sex!

While you sleep:

- Try to make your bedroom quiet, dim, and cool; and,
- Avoid too many blankets and electric blankets - if you are too hot you do not go into a deep sleep. You will also have more nightmares.

When you cannot fall asleep:

- Get up if you cannot sleep after trying for 15 to 20 minutes. Staying in bed when you are feeling restless and anxious is unlikely to result in sleep;
- Do something quiet and distracting (eg. cards, reading, jigsaw, knitting, warm bath). If your mind is very active or you are worrying about problems in your life, it may be helpful to engage in an activity that requires some degree of mental effort (eg. a crossword). By distracting yourself from your worries, you may find it easier to wind down and become sleepy;
- Go back to bed when you feel more relaxed and sleepy; and,
- If you are still awake after a further 15 to 20 minutes of trying to sleep, get out of bed again.

Repeat this process until you fall asleep shortly after returning to bed.