



How to get a good night sleep?

13 (lucky for some)
tips for getting better
quality sleep

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Introduction

A good night's sleep is just as important as regular exercise and a healthy diet. In fact, it can be argued that sleep, diet and exercise combine to form the 'wellbeing trinity' – the three key pillars for ensuring your health and wellbeing. Over the past few decades, both sleep quality and quantity has declined considerably and many people regularly struggle to get an adequate amount of sleep, thus putting their health and wellbeing at risk.

Sleep helps you feel good and makes sure that your body and brain function properly. Poor sleep can have negative effects on many parts of your body and brain, including learning, memory, mood, emotions and various biological functions. In fact, sleep is potentially the single most important biological experience that we all have and the ill-health effects of failing to ensure adequate hours of sleep cannot be underestimated.

Some people have no problem falling asleep. However, many others have severe difficulty falling and staying asleep during the night. Falling asleep may feel like an impossible dream when you are awake at 3am, but good sleep is more under your control than you might think. Following healthy sleep habits can make the difference between restlessness and restful slumber. Researchers have identified a variety of practices and habits, known as 'sleep hygiene', that can help anyone maximise the hours they spend sleeping, even those whose sleep is affected by insomnia. This guide contains what I believe are the best 'sleep hygiene' tips that you can adopt to strive towards a better night's sleep.

When exploring the general principles of 'sleep hygiene' I encourage you to remember 'TO BED' which is an acronym for the 5 key components – Thoughts, Our Environment, Behaviours, Exercise and Diet. These elements form the recommended behavioural and environmental practices that are intended to promote better quality sleep. They all contribute in some way to how well, or in most cases, how poorly we sleep, and simple adjustments can improve both the quality and quantity of sleep we achieve. The concept was developed in the late 1970's as a method to help people with mild to moderate insomnia and has had many proven successes.



TIP 1: Keep in sync with your body's natural sleep wake cycle

Getting in sync with your body's natural sleep-wake cycle, or circadian rhythm, is one of the most important strategies for sleeping better. If you keep a regular sleep wake schedule, you will feel much more refreshed and energised than if you sleep the same number of hours at different times, even if you only alter your sleep schedule by an hour or so. Humans are creatures of habit, so it is important that you go to sleep and get up at the same time every day, including weekends.

The problem for most people is that they will indulge in a cheeky lie-in on a weekend but by the time it comes round to work on Monday again the body is crying out for the extra hours of sleep you gave it at the weekend. If you need to make up for a late night, opt for a daytime nap instead of sleeping in. This allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm.

It is worth mentioning the concepts of effective napping at this point. It is advisable that a nap should last no longer than 20 minutes as after this time you will transfer into deep sleep and will wake up feeling worse than before you napped. You should also ensure that naps take place before 17:00 or not at all, as evening napping has a significant impact on your inability to fall asleep later in the day.

Napping is a great way of making up for lost sleep, but if you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night, then napping should be avoided. Let's use an analogy. If you had a buffet at lunchtime it is unlikely that you will want to eat another meal at teatime. The same principle applies to napping. If you nap in the afternoon, it is unlikely that sleep will be easily achieved later in the day.

Adopting a regular sleep routine helps set the body's internal body clock and optimises the quality of your sleep. Choose a bed time when you normally feel tired, so that you don't toss and turn. If you are getting enough sleep, you should eventually wake up naturally without an alarm. If you need an alarm clock, you may also need an earlier bedtime. If you get sleepy way before your bedtime, get off the sofa and do something mildly stimulating as if you give in to the drowsiness, you may wake up later in the night and have trouble getting back to sleep.



TIP 2: Control your exposure to light

Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone controlled by light exposure that helps regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Your brain secretes more melatonin when it is dark – making you sleepy – and less when it is light – making you more alert. However, many aspects of modern life can alter your body's production of melatonin and shift your circadian rhythm.

One of the things that most of us will do before going to sleep is to brush our teeth on a brightly lit bathroom. This practice tells our brain that it is still day time and thus keeps us awake. Similarly, if you wake up for the toilet during the night and decide to turn on the light, this tells the brain that it is time to get up and you may find that you struggle to get back off to sleep when returning to bed.

Therefore at night it is advisable to avoid bright screens within 1-2 hours of your bedtime. The blue light emitted by your phone, tablet or computer can be especially disruptive. You can minimise the impact by using devices with smaller screens, wearing glasses that block blue light, turning the brightness down or using light-altering software such as 'f.lux'. Not watching TV can also be beneficial as not only does the light from the TV suppress melatonin, but many programs are stimulating rather than relaxing, and so other activities such as reading or listening to music are preferred. Finally, when it is time to sleep, make sure that the room is dark through the use of heavy blackout curtains or the use of a face mask. You may also wish to consider covering up electronics that emit annoying light.

In the morning, light can be useful to wake us up and exposure to 30 minutes of natural light in the morning will synchronise the body clock for the upcoming day. It is also important to spend more time doing activities such as taking breaks outside or walking during daylight hours. You should also let as much natural light into your home or workplace as possible so keep the blinds and curtains open during the day and try and move your desk closer to the window. In the winter months, where light levels are reduced, using a light therapy box can be beneficial as it simulates sunshine.



TIP 3: Relax, clear your thoughts and use techniques to take control of the wandering mind

Do you often find yourself unable to get to sleep or regularly waking up night after night? Residual stress, worry and anger from your day can make it very difficult to sleep well. Taking steps to manage your overall stress levels and learning how to curb the worrying habit can make it easier to unwind at night. You can also try developing a relaxing bedtime ritual to help you prepare your mind for sleep, such as practicing a relaxation technique (see Tip 10), taking a warm bath or listening to soft music.

Problems clearing your head at night can also stem from your daytime habits. The more overstimulated your brain becomes during the day, the harder it can be to slow down and unwind at night. Maybe, like many of us, you are constantly interrupting tasks during the day to check your phone, email or social media. Then when it comes to getting to sleep at night, your brain is so accustomed to seeking fresh stimulation, it becomes difficult to unwind. Help yourself by setting aside specific times during the day for checking your phone and social media and, as much as possible, try to focus on one task at a time. You'll be better able to calm your mind at bedtime. Using sleep diaries to track and record your daytime and pre-sleep activities is a useful way of monitoring what may be causing you to have a sleepless night.

Try and wind down and clear your head. Hard as it may be, try not to stress over your inability to fall asleep, because that stress only encourages your body to stay awake. To stay out of your head, focus on the feelings in your body or practice breathing exercises. There are many techniques you can use to take control of the wandering mind.

The first is 'cognitive control', or more commonly known as journaling. The idea is that you set aside some time before going to bed to think about all of the things that are worrying you and then write them down in a journal. By doing this you are removing them from your brain. Once you have finished, close the journal and that is a symbolic gesture that says to the brain *"I am done for today...I am giving myself permission to switch off."* If you



wake during the night feeling anxious about something, simply make a brief note of it, and this postpones worrying about it until the next day when it will be easier to resolve. Similarly, if a great idea is keeping you awake, make a note of it and fall back to sleep knowing you will be much more productive after a good night's rest. Journaling can also be used to write down the positive events that happened during the day and can create a state of gratitude and happiness, downgrade stressful events and promote more relaxation at bedtime.



If you are going to empty your brain of all your worries, inevitably thoughts will jump in to the empty space and so as such we need to use some 'cognitive distraction'. Many of us will have tried counting sheep but to no avail. This is because it is too simple. A technique I would advocate is to count back from 1000 in 7's. It is not important that you get the numbers right, but it is important that you try. You will find that you will either become exhausted or bored and thus tiredness will ensue.

Finally, it is believed that if you go to bed and try to force yourself to fall asleep, your chances of succeeding drop dramatically. Thus the final technique – 'paradoxical intention' - demonstrates the quirkiness of the human mind and is a proven method for promoting sleep. This technique recommends trying to stay awake instead of forcing yourself to sleep. This technique is based on the idea that the stress and anxiety produced by forcing yourself to fall asleep can prevent you from relaxing and snoozing off. One study showed that people who use this technique tend to fall asleep faster. To demonstrate how this works let's do a quick experiment.

I don't want you to think about the purple elephant. What did you just do? You thought about the purple elephant. That is because no matter how hard you try, if you tell your brain not to do something it will almost certainly do the opposite. This principle can therefore be applied to sleep. You may have found yourself sat at home watching a film or going to the theatre late at night and suddenly you begin to feel sleepy. As such you physically tell yourself *'don't you dare fall asleep'* but what happens in reality is that you go into a deep slumber. So next time you are laid in bed struggling to sleep, simply tell yourself *'I am comfy, satisfied and not ready to sleep'* and you may find that sleep quickly ensues.

Give these techniques a go, they have been scientifically proven to work.

TIP 4: Turn your bedroom into a sleep-inducing environment

Do you sleep better in a hotel room or at home? This basic assessment may indicate whether your sleeping environment is appropriate for inducing sleep.

A peaceful bedtime routine sends a powerful signal to your brain that it is time to wind down and let go of the day's stressors. Sometimes even small changes to your sleeping environment can make a big difference to your quality of sleep.

It is important to keep the noise levels down. If you can't avoid or eliminate noise from neighbours, traffic or others in your household, try masking it with a fan or sound machine. Earplugs may also help. It is important to keep your room cool. Your body temperature changes as you fall asleep. Core temperature decreases, while the temperature of your hands and feet increases. Most people sleep best in a slightly cool room (18 degrees) with adequate ventilation. Individual preferences will vary, so find the temperature that works best for you. A bedroom that is too hot or too cold can interfere with quality sleep.

Make sure your bed is comfortable. Your bed covers should leave you enough room to stretch and turn comfortably without being tangled. If you often wake up with a sore back or aching neck, you may need to experiment with different levels of mattress firmness, foam toppers and pillows that provide more or less support. It has been shown that a comfortable mattress and bedding can have a remarkable effect on the depth and quality of sleep. A medium-firm mattress has been shown to positively affect sleep quality and prevent sleep disturbances and muscular discomfort. The quality of your pillow is also crucial. It can affect your neck curve, temperature and comfort. Studies have shown that orthopaedic pillows may be better than feather or memory foam pillows. Additionally, the use of a weighted blanket could reduce body stress and help improve your sleep.

If pets regularly wake you up during the night, you may want to consider keeping them out of the bedroom. It may also help to limit your bedroom activities to sleeping only. Keeping computers, TV's and work materials out of the room will strengthen the mental association between your bedroom and sleep. Lastly, the fabric of clothes you wear for bed can affect how well you sleep. It is crucial that you choose comfortable clothing made of fabric that helps you keep a pleasant temperature throughout the night.



TIP 5: Establish a soothing pre-sleep routine

Ease the transition from wake time to sleep time with a period of relaxing activities an hour or so before bed. Taking a bath is one of the best things you can do because the rise and then fall in body temperature simulates the natural occurrences in the body which simulates sleep and makes you drowsy). Alternatively you could read a book, listen to soothing music or practice relaxation practices.

Avoid stressful, stimulating activities and emotional issues. Physically and psychologically stressful activities can cause the body to secrete the stress hormone cortisol, which is associated with increased alertness.

Don't be a nightmare clock watcher. Human beings want to know what time of day it is all the time, including during the night. Staring at the clock in your bedroom, either when you are trying to fall asleep or when you wake up in the middle of the night, only reinforces the reality that you are not sleeping leading to more stress and making it harder to fall asleep. If you are one of these people, turn your clocks face away from you or lock your mobile phone in the bedside cabinet.



TIP 6: Exercise Regularly

Working out effectively can tire your body out gently, promoting a better night's sleep.

People who exercise regularly throughout the day sleep better at night and feel less sleepy during the day. Regular exercises also improve the symptoms of insomnia and sleep apnoea and increase the amount of time you spend in the deep, restorative stages of sleep.

The more vigorously you exercise, the more powerful the sleep benefits. But even light exercise, such as walking for 10 minutes a day, will improve sleep quality. Relaxing, low-impact exercises such as yoga or gentle stretching in the evening can also help to improve sleep. It can take several months of regular activity before you experience the full sleep promoting effects, so be patient and focus on building an exercise habit that sticks.

For better sleep, it is important to time your exercise right. Exercise speeds up your metabolism, elevates body temperature and stimulates hormones such as cortisol. This isn't a problem if you are exercising in the morning or afternoon, but too close to bed time and it can interfere with sleep. Try to finish moderate to vigorous workouts at least three hours before bedtime. If you are still experiencing sleep difficulties, move your workouts even earlier.



TIP 7: Be smart about what you eat and drink

Eating habits play a role in how well you sleep, especially in the hours before bed time. Caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, spicy foods and foods that contain high sugar and fat content should all be avoided before bed time as these hinder good quality sleep. Bananas, cereals, milk and yoghurt are all examples of healthy bed time snacks that are known to promote better sleep. For more information read my second guide – '*Food for Thought*' – which provided additional advice on this particular aspect of sleep hygiene.

Certain supplements can also help you to sleep faster. They have been shown to encourage sleep either by boosting the production of sleep-promoting hormones or by calming brain activity:

- Magnesium – Doses of 200-400mg per day, taken with food, have been shown to improve sleep.
- 5HTP – Doses of 300-500mg per day seem to be effective in treating insomnia
- Melatonin – Doses of 0.5-5mg taken 30 minutes before bed seems to improve sleep quality
- Theanine – Doses of 200mg per day seem to be useful in sedation and relaxation
- GABA – Doses of 250-500mg are recommended to help the central nervous system relax
- Ginkgo Biloba – Doses of 250mg 30-60 minutes before bed of this natural herb aids sleep, relaxation and stress reduction
- Glycine – Doses of 3g can improve sleep quality
- Valerian root – Doses of 500mg before bed can help you fall asleep quicker and improve sleep quality
- Lavender – Doses of 80-160mg can induce a calming and sedentary effect to improve sleep

It is also important not to drink any liquids before bed. 'Nocturia', the medical term for excessive urination during the night, affects sleep quality and daytime energy. It is therefore advisable to try and avoid drinking fluids 1-2 hours before bed.



TIP 8: Sleep only when you are ready to sleep

You may have heard people referring to themselves as either a 'lark' or an 'owl'. 'Larks' are early birds and so people who refer to themselves as 'larks' tend to wake up early and are ready to face the day that lies ahead. 'Owls' on the other hand are people who tend to wake later, struggle to wake up and stay up later at night.

For couples who have different 'chronotypes' this can present an issue as couples tend to go to bed at the same time. However, for the person who isn't ready to sleep, this can often lead them to develop a long standing difficulty of getting off to sleep. A way to deal with this is to have 'cuddle time'. Yes, I know this sounds a bit soppy but it does work. The couple schedules a bedtime suited to the 'lark' (morning person) but the 'owl' (night person) goes to bed with the intention of not falling asleep.

People find themselves at an increased risk of developing insomnia due to a mismatch between the individual's biological preference (the predetermined disposition to sleep early) and going to bed late. Our sleep preferences tend to be influenced by the responsibilities associated with our social activities such as work and this is referred to as 'social jet lag'.

Some people can fall asleep easily enough but wake up frequently during the night. It's perfectly normal to wake briefly during the night, but some people have trouble falling back asleep. Struggling to fall asleep, or forcing yourself to sleep when you aren't naturally ready, only leads to frustration and a vicious cycle of wakefulness.

We should all go to bed when we are tired but if you are not asleep within 20 minutes, it is recommended that you get up and find another activity to do. Get out of bed, go to another room, and do something relaxing until you are tired enough to sleep. The idea of this method, known as 'stimulus control', is to build a strong association between bed and sleeping, and eventually you will be able to fall asleep quickly.



TIP 9: Decide on how much sleep you need...and then stick to it!

With sleep taking up about a third of one's life, people will often ask, how much sleep do I need when seeking more time for work and activities?

Sleep is vital in achieving a healthy lifestyle but the needs for sleep vary with age, as well as with each individual. Sleep quality is of utmost importance as it disturbs your everyday health both mentally and physically. Not enough sleep will have an adverse impact on health including the heart, brain, immune system and even cause weight gain. Without enough sleep, productivity and creativity will be affected as well.

Routinely sleeping less than 6 hours per night demolishes your immune system, more than doubling your risk of cancer. Short sleeping increases the likelihood of your coronary arteries becoming blocked and brittle, setting you on a path towards cardiovascular disease, stroke and congestive heart failure. Sleep disruption further contributes to all major psychiatric conditions including depression, anxiety and suicidality.

So how much sleep do you need? Well, there is no universal answer and this varies from person to person. It is important to find out how much sleep you personally need and ensure you achieve this. As a rough estimate, you should have 1 hour of sleep for every 2 hours you have been awake. Although eight hours seems to be the norm that most refer to when determining the amount of sleep they require, sleep needs do vary by age. By using a calculation we can also determine how much sleep we need.

Understand that the regular sleep cycle is about 90 minutes long. There are 5 sleep cycles each night for the average person. By multiplying 90 minutes by the 5 sleep cycles you will get 450 minutes. Divide the 450 by 60 (minutes in the hour) and you will find that 7.5 hours of sleep is needed for a full night's sleep. Determine your time needed to wake up and then count 7.5 hours back to determine the time you should be going to bed.

Once you have determined how much sleep you personally need, you need to stick to it. So if you need 8 hours, there is no point going to bed in the early hours of the morning when you have to get up early to go to work. You are only cutting sleep short, depriving yourself of adequate rest and accumulating sleep debt...which will eventually have to be repaid.

Through understanding your specific needs, and using math to calculate sleep patterns and behaviour, you can easily determine just how much sleep you require.



TIP 10: Use relaxation techniques

Many of us lead stressful lives. Demanding jobs, long hours and active families all contribute to a hectic lifestyle, and that is not helped by the intense media that surrounds us. These elements make it very difficult to wind down but relaxation techniques can be adopted to promote a deep and restful sleep. Relaxation promotes sleep by relaxing the muscles and calming the mind.

It is important to make relaxation your goal rather than sleep. Even though it is not a replacement for sleep, relaxation can still help to rejuvenate the body.

Simple breathing exercises are a great way to keep you calm and relieve the body of unwanted tension. Breathing from your belly rather than your chest can activate the relaxation response and lower your heart rate, blood pressure and stress levels to help you drift off to sleep. Lie down in bed and close your eyes. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little. Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little. Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

An alternative technique is to use the 8-8-8 breathing method – breathe in for 8 seconds, hold your breath for 8 seconds and then exhale for 8 seconds. It is a simple but powerful breathing method that promotes calmness and relaxation. The breathing pattern relaxes the nervous system and can be practiced anytime you feel anxious or stressed.

Yoga, meditation and mindfulness are all tools to calm the mind and relax the body. Moreover, they have been shown to improve sleep. Yoga encourages the practice of breathing patterns and body movements that release stress and tension accumulated in the body. Meditation can enhance melatonin levels and assist the brain in achieving a specific state where sleep is easily achieved. Lastly, mindfulness may help you to maintain focus on the present and worry less while falling asleep. Practicing something called a 'body scan' will allow you to identify tension in certain areas of the body and release this to help you relax. Practicing one or all of these techniques can help you to get a good night's rest and wake up re-energized.



Listening to relaxing music before bed can significantly improve sleep quality. It can even be used to improve chronic sleep disorders such as insomnia. Studies have shown that listening to 45 minutes of music before bed promotes deeper sleep. Some people have stated that 'sounds of the rainforest' and 'whale song' induce a sleepy state so these may be beneficial.

Aromatherapy involves the use of essential oils and is commonly used by those who have trouble falling asleep as it helps with relaxation. Lavender and damask rose are popular scents with positive effects on sleep. An essential oil diffuser could be helpful in infusing your room with relaxing scents that encourage sleep.



You can also use visualisation techniques. Instead of lying in bed worrying and thinking about stressful things, visualise a place that makes you feel happy and calm. Focusing on one thing at a time will filter out distractions which may be preventing you sleeping. Research has shown that patients suffering from insomnia are able to fall asleep faster after they were instructed to use an 'imaginary distraction'. This technique helped them occupy their mind with good thoughts instead of engaging with worries and concerns during the pre-sleep time.

Finally, you can try Progressive Relaxation Technique which was created in the 1920's as a technique for learning to monitor and control the state of muscular tension. It involves deliberately introducing tension into muscle groups in sequence. This tension is then released with attention paid to the contrast between tension and relaxation and allows the person to become more aware of your body and physical sensations.

Relaxation can also include walking to clear the mind, stretching and adopting good body posture.

TIP 11: Adjust your sleep position

Good quality sleep may depend on your body position during the night.

There are three main sleeping positions – back, stomach and side. Traditionally, it was believed that back sleepers had a better quality of sleep. However, research has shown that this might not be the best position to sleep in, as it can lead to blocked airways, sleep apnoea and snoring.

In fact, one study determined that people who reported consistent poor sleep spent more time on their back. Although individual preferences play an important role in choosing sleep position, the side position seems to be linked to high quality sleep. When sleeping on your side, ensure that your nose is lined up with the centre of your body.

If you wake up with a stiff neck it may be down to your pillow. Pillows should be the right size – not too fat and not too flat – to support the natural curve of your neck when you are resting on your back. Sleeping on your stomach should also be avoided as it twists your neck and may lead to further discomfort and pain.

You can also try a leg pillow for back pain. Your lower back may not hurt enough to wake you up, but mild pain can disturb the deep, restful stages of sleep. Put a pillow between your legs to align your hips better and stress your lower back less. It is also important to put your neck into a 'neutral' position.

Finally, it is also important to adopt good posture before bed such as when working off a laptop or straining your neck to watch TV.



TIP 12: Cut out the caffeine!

Most of us will try and mute our sleep signals by using caffeine to make us feel more awake and alert.

Caffeine is not a food supplement, rather, it is the most widely used and abused psychoactive stimulant in the world. Caffeine – which is not only prevalent in coffee, certain teas, and many energy drinks, but also foods such as dark chocolate and ice cream, as well as drugs such as weight loss pills and pain relievers – is one of the most common culprits that keep people from sleeping. Be aware that ‘decaffeinated’ does not mean ‘non-caffeinated’ as one cup of decaf contains 15-30% of the caffeine of a normal cup of coffee.

Levels of circulating caffeine peak approximately 30 minutes after consumption. However, what is problematic is the persistence of caffeine in the human body. In pharmacology, a drug’s efficacy is discussed using the term ‘half-life’. Put simply, this refers to the length of time it takes the body to remove 50% of the drugs concentration. Caffeine has an average half-life of approximately five to seven hours. So, if you have a cup of coffee after your evening meal (perhaps 19:00), 50% of the caffeine you consumed will still be active and circulating in the brain at approximately 1:30 in the morning. As such, sleep will not come easily or be smooth throughout the night as your brain continues to battle against the opposing force of caffeine. For this reason, it is advisable that any individual suffering from a sleep problem does not consume caffeine after midday.

Caffeine is removed from the system by an enzyme within the liver which gradually degrades the caffeine over time. Some of us will have a more efficient version of the enzyme meaning we can rapidly remove the caffeine from our bloodstream and thus tend not to experience the sleep side effects regardless of the coffee we drink. However, others have a slower acting enzyme and it takes far longer for their system to remove the same amount of caffeine and so find themselves more vulnerable to caffeine’s effects on sleeping. Age also alters the speed of caffeine clearance. The older you are, the longer it takes the brain and body to remove caffeine and the more sensitive you become in later life to caffeine’s sleep-disrupting influence.



TIP 13: If all else fails...rule out a sleep disorder!

Sleep problems and disorders are very common and in fact it is estimated that approximately one third of the population will be affected by one in their life. Insomnia is the most common type of sleep disorder where person has poor quality sleep, not enough sleep and wakes up for long periods during the night. It is the inability to fall or remain asleep over a period of several nights and may be due to stress, anxiety, hormonal changes, lifestyle, environmental factors, physical ailments, or psychiatric illness.

Another common issue is sleep apnoea, which causes inconsistent and interrupted breathing. People with this disorder stop breathing repeatedly while sleeping. This condition is more common than you think with approximately 24% of men and 9% of women suffering from the condition in the UK. Restless leg syndrome affects approximately 3.9% of the population and is more common in women. The disorder is characterised by unpleasant sensations in the legs and an uncontrollable urge to move when resting as an attempt to relieve these feelings which stops people from falling asleep. Other common medically diagnosed issues include sleep movement disorders and circadian rhythm sleep-wake disorders, which are common in shift workers.

But it may be an underlying health condition that is the cause of your sleep problems. Medical reasons such as pain from arthritis, breathing problems such as asthma and menopausal symptoms can all prevent natural sleep. A person suffering from stress, anxiety or general worry can struggle to sleep as it keeps the alertness centre of the brain active. In fact, being overweight can also be a factor as 40% of overweight people have a sleep problem.

Also, as anyone who has tried to get to sleep with a blocked nose or headache knows, short term health problems can also stop you from getting a good night's sleep. It can be easy to forget with minor symptoms, but you will thank yourself when night falls if you prioritise speaking to a pharmacist about appropriate medication for symptom management.

If you have always struggled with sleep, it may be wise to consult with your GP or a qualified sleep medicine specialist.



