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Sleep Management

Working Minds UK: Dovey Wilday Consultancy
Contact: 07941 196379

SLEEP MANAGEMENT

Sleep problems occur frequently in people suffering from depression/anxiety.

Common difficulties include: -

- Having difficulty in going to sleep at night
- Frequent or prolonged awakenings during the night
- Waking early
- Sleeping too much
- Sleep is seldom refreshing.

If you are dissatisfied with your sleep, you may find the following information will help to improve the quality of your sleep.

In this section we will look at:

- 1. Some general facts about sleep**
- 2. Factors that contribute to poor sleep**
- 3. Methods to help you improve your sleep**
 - **Establishing an optimal sleep pattern**
 - **Sleep hygiene**
 - **Preparing for sleep**
 - **Reducing worries at night**
- 4. How to deal with the frustration of not being able to sleep**
- 5. How to reduce your sleep if you sleep too much**

Some General Facts About Sleep

There is no 'right' amount of time that everyone should sleep. People vary enormously in terms of how many hours sleep they need. Some people are quite happy on four or five hours sleep each night, while others need nine or ten hours. So, if you go to bed expecting eight hours sleep when your natural need is only six, you are likely to spend two frustrating 'sleepless' hours during which time you are needlessly trying to get to sleep.

It is quite all right if you lose a lot of sleep for several nights running. People sometimes believe that if they lose a few hours sleep one night, they should make up for it by getting a few extra hours sleep the next night. This is not necessary. You can lose a lot of sleep night after night, but eventually you will have fairly good nights sleep and this is quite sufficient.

People who have serious sleeping difficulties often believe that they 'haven't slept a wink all night'. In fact, it has been found that it is nearly always the case that they do get to sleep far more than they think they have. In other words they 'slip off' to sleep for a few hours, then wake up without realising that they have been asleep. It is very easy to make this mistake when lying in a dark and quiet bedroom.

Remember that people need less sleep as they get older. A person may need nine solid hours of sleep at the age of twenty four, but only require six or seven hours sleep when aged forty.

Factors That Can Contribute To Poor Sleep

1. An Irregular Sleep Pattern

Not going to bed and getting up at regular times.

2. Daytime Inactivity

This can increase your feelings of fatigue, and desire for catnaps.

3. Daytime Catnaps

These will make you require less sleep at night.

4. Caffeine Containing Substances

Coffee, tea, coca cola, particularly in large quantities late at night.

5. Bed and environment

Uncomfortable mattress, too hot/cold, excessive noise.

6. Worries

These can lead to tension and an inability to relax at bedtime.

7. Emotions

As we have discussed earlier emotions can influence our sleep patterns (see what is anxiety and depression)

Anxiety: When we have our fight/flight mode activated, our sleep will be disturbed often with delayed onset of sleep, broken sleep or only experiencing light sleep that leads us to wake feeling unrefreshed.

Depression: When our bodies are in a loss mode, as in depression, our sleep is often shortened to enable longer conscious processing of loss, as well as the need for less sleep because we are less active when depressed.

Methods To Help You Improve Your Sleep

Establishing An Optimal Sleep Pattern

Your sleep pattern is optimal when it is both efficient and regular. By efficient, we mean the time spent asleep relative to the time spent in bed.

1. Go to bed when you are sleepy, rather than always going at a set time.
2. Do not read or watch television in bed, these are waking activities.
3. Turn the light off straight away.
4. If you are not asleep within 20 minutes, go to another room and sit and relax until you feel sleepy again.
5. Repeat step 4 as often as is required, and also if you waken for long periods in the night.
6. Get up at the same time each day. It may be helpful to set your alarm clock.
7. Do not take recovery sleep during the day, to compensate for a previous bad night.
8. Do not nap during the day.

Follow this programme rigidly. It can take several weeks to establish an efficient and regular pattern.

Sleep Hygiene

This refers to general advice that may help to promote good sleep.

1. ***Exercise***

Avoid exercise near bedtime, as this may waken you up.

2. ***Diet***

Snacks before bedtime should be light, and fluid intake limited.

3. ***Stimulants***

Cigarettes, and caffeine containing substances (coffee & tea) should be avoided or reduced 4-6 hours before bedtime.

4. ***Alcohol***

Used regularly as a hypnotic and should be avoided, have a milky drink instead. (We know that it can be common for people with anxiety/depression to drink too much alcohol)

5. ***Environment***

It is important that your bed and bedroom become associated with sleep, rather than wakefulness, therefore, try not to use your bedroom during the day. Your bed and mattress should be comfortable. Room temperature should be around 18 degrees.

Preparing For Sleep

A set routine will help you to prepare mentally and physically for sleep.

1. Try to wind down in the hour or so before you go to bed.
2. Include relaxing activities such as watching television, having a warm bath, listening to music in your schedule.
3. Avoid stimulating activities that will keep you alert, for example work, studying, decision making.
4. Develop a regular order of doing things, e.g. locking up the house, turning out the lights, brushing your teeth, etc. This will act as a signal to your body that it is preparing for sleep.

Problem Solving Strategy For Reducing Worries At Night

Lying in bed at night worrying about problems can make you feel tense and prevent you from going to sleep. The following problem solving strategy may help you to reduce worries at night:

1. Set aside 20 minutes in early evening.
2. Write down problems or loose ends that you have not dealt with during the day. Write down possible steps to resolve the problems, or to tie up the loose ends. Re-allocate time to do the actual work.
3. Consider other longer-term problems that may intrude on your sleep, for example, emotional, financial or other worries.
4. Write down the first or next positive step of action to take and when you will take it.
5. If you cannot go to sleep or waken worrying about a problem, remind yourself that you have the matter in hand, and that worrying about it now will not help.
6. If new worries occur to you at night, 'refer' them to the next day.

How To Deal With Frustration About Not Being Able To Sleep

If you become frustrated about not being able to sleep, and worry about the possible consequences for the next day, it is likely that you will inhibit sleep further by trying harder to fall asleep.

1. Do not try too hard to fall asleep.
2. Tell yourself that 'sleep will come when it is ready', and that 'relaxing in bed is almost as good'.
3. Try to keep your eyes open in the darkened room and as they naturally close tell yourself to 'resist closing them for another few seconds'. This procedure 'tempts' sleep to take over.
4. Visualise a pleasing scene or try repeating a semantically neutral word (such as "the") every few seconds.
5. A relaxation programme may be helpful – this should be carried out in bed at night. It can also be practiced at other times of the day as well.

6. Concentrate on your breathing – try to breathe deeply and slowly. Repeat silently the words ‘in’ and ‘out’ in time to your breathing. Try breathing in to the count of ‘three’ and out to the count of ‘four’. Tense and then relax each of the following parts of your body for a few seconds:

- Arms
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Legs
- Stomach

Tense each part of your body for a couple of seconds, but relax them for ten seconds.

When you are able to distinguish between tension and relaxation, try relaxing, without tensing first.

Relaxation is a skill which takes time to master. However, it is worth persevering in order to gain benefit.

How To Reduce Your Sleep At Night, If You Sleep Too Much

If you sleep for more than 10 hours a night, you may waken feeling unrefreshed, and feel that you need to go back to sleep. You are probably sleeping for too long, and would benefit from cutting down your hours.

1. Cut down your sleep time gradually – either by going to bed ½ an hour later, or getting up ½ hour earlier.
2. Establish a set waking up time and going to bedtime.
3. Be consistent in either getting up earlier, or going to bed later.
4. Do not compensate by getting up later or going to bed earlier if you feel more tired.
5. Review your sleep pattern weekly, and continue to reduce your sleep time gradually until you are sleeping for the amount of time with which you are happy.

After changing your sleep pattern, you may feel more tired for the first few weeks, but in the long run you can expect to feel more energetic. The quality of your sleep should increase, as the quantity of your sleep decreases.