Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Sleep Hygiene v7

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Sleep Hygiene

Patient Information

Sleep Service

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Introduction

Sleep is an essential part of life and contributes to us feeling well and happy. However, most people will experience problems sleeping at some point in their life. Sleep disruption is a common issue, especially at times when you may feel emotionally overwhelmed.

There is no set rule as to how much sleep you need – it varies from person to person. Some people may, need 8 hours sleep each night; others may need more or less than this. Sleep patterns can also vary with age, with older people often needing less sleep than younger adults.

What causes sleep disruption?

Sleep disturbance can be caused by several factors:

- Emotional factors – anxiety, stress, depression
- Change of daily routine – travelling, change in work hours
- Medical Factors – pain, bladder problems
- Environmental factors – noise, light, temperature of bedroom
- Drug and alcohol use.

What is sleep hygiene?

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have a normal, quality night's sleep and increase daytime alertness.

Why is good sleep hygiene important?

Sleep hygiene is important for everyone, no matter their age, to promote healthy sleep and daytime alertness. Good sleep hygiene can also prevent the development of sleep disorders such as insomnia.

How can I improve my sleep hygiene?

The following suggestions are examples of good sleep hygiene and should help achieve a more restful night's sleep:

1. **Go to bed at the same time and get up from bed at the same time every day.**

   Regular waking times leads to regular sleep onset and helps "set" the body clock.

2. **Reduce or avoid sleeping during the day**

   Staying awake during the day helps you fall asleep at night. Any naps longer than 30 minutes will increase the chances of having a disturbed night's sleep.

3. **Take regular exercise during the day**

   Exercise promotes more restful sleep, but vigorous exercise should not be carried out within 3 hours of going to bed. Relaxing exercise such as yoga can be done before bed to aid sleep.

4. **Limit or avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine before bedtime**

   Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and so can cause difficulty in falling asleep, awakenings during the night and shallow sleep. Although alcohol may help people fall asleep more easily, it causes disturbances later in the night.

5. **Avoid going to bed hungry or too full**

Food can be disruptive right before bed so avoid heavy meals before bedtime. Hunger can also disturb sleep.

6. **Only use the bed for sleeping and sex**

Avoid watching television, listening to the radio, or reading in bed. This will help your brain to see bed as a place for sleeping.

7. **Don't take your problems to bed**

Worrying may interfere with sleep or cause shallow sleep. Try and plan some time earlier in the evening to work on problems or plan for the next day.

8. **Try to have a relaxing bedtime routine**

Try muscle relaxation, a warm bath, or a milky drink to help you unwind before bed.

9. **Keep the bedroom quiet, dark and a comfortable temperature**

This will reduce the likelihood of you waking up during the night. Carpets, earplugs, and thicker curtains may help.

10. **Don't force yourself to try to go to sleep**

This will only make your mind and body more alert. Remove/hide any clocks from view so you are not constantly checking the time. If you are unable to sleep within 30 minutes then get up, go to a different room, and carry out a peaceful activity, then return to bed when you feel sleepy. Avoid exposure to bright light during this time.

11. **Get regular exposure to natural light**

This is important for older people who may not venture out as frequently as children and adults. Light exposure helps maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.

If needed, you may try over the counter sleep remedies however these are no substitute for addressing the problems that cause poor sleep. Sleeping tablets do not address these issues either and are not suitable for a lot of people.

Other sources of useful information:

- **NHS UK Every Mind Matters** - www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/

- **Help the Aged** - www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/mind-body/getting-a-good-nights-sleep/



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