

The Wellness Toolkit: the importance of sleep

As a society, we are just waking up to the crucial importance of a healthy sleep routine. Impaired or poor quality sleep can affect cognition (such as clarity of thought or concentration) and mood (which can mean feeling frustrated, sad or low) so it's really important that we get sleep right.

Poor sleep can have a number of causes, including difficulties in establishing a regular sleep routine and existing concerns (such as relationships or financial worries) that make sleep difficult. Poor sleep can also be brought about by a major life change, such as becoming a parent. These causes can in turn be exacerbated by unsatisfactory sleep, perpetuating a cycle which can negatively impact all aspects of wellbeing.

Fortunately, there's an increasing body of evidence about ways to address sleep difficulties. Perhaps the number one tip is to keep regular sleep hours. Going to bed when you feel tired and getting up at roughly the same time helps to regulate your internal body clock – which teaches your body to sleep better. Some simple sleep 'rituals' – also known as 'sleep hygiene' – can help to make sleep easier:

- Make sure that your bedroom is set up for sleep: dark, quiet and cool environments generally make it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- Prepare to wind down before you're going to bed: this signals to your body your intention to sleep. Current thinking recommends that you avoid looking at electronic screens for at least half an hour before bed.
- Practice winding down: it could be taking a warm bath or shower, reading, drinking a herbal tea (e.g. camomile), practising deep breathing, or anything else which you find relaxing.
- Consider writing down your thoughts: if you have a naturally busy mind, or find that constant thinking is hindering relaxation, you may find it helpful to keep a notebook or journal.
- Don't force it: if you're lying in bed and unable to sleep, get up. Do something relaxing for a bit (like reading a book) and go back to bed when you feel sleepier.

If you do find yourself trying to get through the working day on little sleep, you may wish to let your line manager and/or colleagues know – all of us have days when (for whatever reason) we're not feeling 100% rested. You might be pleasantly surprised by readily your colleagues will empathise. And try not to judge yourself or your performance too harshly – it can be exhausting to complete even the simplest of tasks when decent sleep eludes us.

If you still find it difficult to maintain a satisfactory sleep routine, you may find it helpful to speak with a medical professional. There's plenty of advice and guidance on this topic, including from the [NHS](#).

Wellness myth - sleep

'I've had a few late nights but I can catch up by sleeping in on the weekend'

It might be enjoyable but sleeping in on the weekend won't help you to catch up on missed sleep. Try to keep your sleeping times more regular across the week – you'll feel fresher, more energised and less lethargic.