

**STEPS primary care mental health team, Glasgow**

---

## **Getting a Good Night's Sleep**

**Dr Jim White**

---



©Jim White (2008). All rights reserved. Do not amend in any way.

## **Part 1: Finding out about sleep**

- Sleep quotes
- Reasons for poor sleep
- Types of sleep problems
- Daytime effects of poor sleep

## **Part 2: Getting a good night's sleep**

- Sleeping tips
- Retraining your sleeping

## Sleep quotes

"I can go to bed at night feeling dog tired but as soon as that light goes out, my mind bursts into life. I can't shut it down and get to sleep. I toss and turn and feel rotten. My wife is fast asleep in seconds and I'm wide awake"

"I wake up and feel that I've hardly slept. I still feel tired and don't feel I've got the energy to face the day"

"I'm quite down just now and I find that I can get over to sleep fine but I'm awake at 4 in the morning. And that's me for the night. I'll not get over again even though I want to sleep more"

"I have to take a few drinks to get me over to sleep. But I wake up within a few hours and that might be me for ages"

"I wake up during the night with a load of stupid thoughts going round and round in my head. I just get up and I spend half the night in the living room. I can't tell you how lonely I feel then. And of course, I am walking about like a half-shut knife all the time"

## Reasons for poor sleep

Sleep problems can come about for a range of reasons. Tick all the ones that apply to you:

### Stress

You may find that you are better as long as you can keep busy and distracted. When you go to bed, a host of thoughts or worries can invade your mind. This stops you from getting over to sleep.

### Shift work

This can badly affect sleep, as your body can't get into a good sleep habit.

### Age

As you get older, you need less sleep. Yet you may still try to sleep for the same number of hours as you needed when you were younger.

### Need to go to the toilet

This is often tied to age. Most people over 60 get up at least once a night

### Pain

Any illness that results in pain, itching, etc. can cause poor sleep

### Surrounds

Sleep can be poor if you live in a noisy street or if the neighbours are playing music till all hours. Your room and bed may also play a part.

### Poor bedtime routine

Sleep can be a problem if you eat or drink a lot or try to sleep soon after working.

**We will look at ways to sort some of these later.**

## Types of sleep problems

There are five main types of sleep problem. You may find you have more than one.

Tick the ones that fit your own case:

### Getting over to sleep

You may feel dog-tired when you get ready for bed. But as soon as you get into bed, you can't get over to sleep. You are restless. You toss and turn. Your body may be tired but your mind is not. Your mind bursts into life and you can't switch off. You get more and more annoyed and stressed.

### Staying asleep

You may wake up at different times of the night. You may find it hard to get back over to sleep.

### Waking too early in the morning

You find yourself waking at 4am or 5am and know that you are not going to get any more sleep even though you want to.

### Sleeping too much

No matter how much sleep you get, you never feel it is enough. You may feel that you don't want to face the day so stay in bed. You feel more secure in bed.

### Sleep quality

You feel that you don't get a good nights sleep. You may feel you don't get into a deep sleep. You may feel restless during the night. You don't feel refreshed by your sleep.

## **What happens when we sleep**

Sleep is made up of 5 stages. When you first fall asleep, you go quickly through Stage 1 sleep. This is very light sleep.

As you go into Stage 2 and Stage 3, your sleep gets deeper. You spend most of the night in this type of sleep.

By Stage 4, you are in a very deep sleep. Your body is very relaxed at this stage.

The final stage is called Rapid Eye Movement (**REM**) sleep. This is when most of our dreams occur. We are not sure if dreams mean anything. One view is that dreams help us make sense of the world and help us better cope with stresses we meet. Another view is that they have no meaning and no use. You can make up your own mind.

You will only remember your dreams if you wake up during this stage. Even so, we only recall about 1% of our dreams.

We are more or less paralysed in REM sleep. This may be to stop us acting out our dreams. This ends as soon as we leave the REM stage.

Once REM sleep is over, you go back to Stage 1 sleep. You go through this cycle about 4 or 5 times each night. Each cycle takes about 90 minutes.

As you get older, you seem to need less deep sleep. So as you get older, you spend less time in Stage 4 sleep.

A lack of REM and Deep sleep can badly affect you during the day.

## Daytime effects of poor sleep

You need to sleep to recharge your batteries - both body and mind. If you don't do this then you will drag yourself through the day. You will feel like a half-shut knife.

You may feel:

- tired
- lethargic
- irritable
- less vigilant
- take longer to react
- make more mistakes
- you have poorer concentration and poor memory.
- you just don't feel 'with it'.

If your sleep is poor for some time, you will find it much harder to learn new skills. Poor sleep can have serious effects. Far more deaths on the road are caused by sleepiness than drink and drugs combined.

You may have a vicious circle - stress may cause you to sleep poorly, poor sleep causes more stress and so on....

## **PART 2**

### **Getting a good night's sleep**

**Sleeping tips**

**Retraining your sleeping**

# Sleeping tips

## Part 1: your bedroom (tick the ones that you need to change)

### Get the room fresh

Make sure your bedroom is well aired.

### Heat

Make sure the bed and room are not too hot and not too cold. Around 64F or 18C is best.

### The bed

If your bed is past its best and if you can afford it, think about getting a new one. You should think about changing your mattress about every seven years. Make sure your pillows give you good support.

### Light

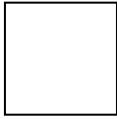
Keep your room as dark as you can. Put linings on your curtains. Wear an eye mask.

### Noise

It might be hard to stop noise from outside the house. Make sure you control as much noise inside the house as you can. If there is a lot of noise, use earplugs. You can also get an FM radio, tune it off the station so you get 'white noise'. This can help mask other noises.

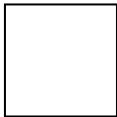
## Part 2: *Get your mind and body calm*

### **Exercise**



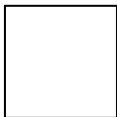
Exercise can help you sleep better. Do this in the morning, afternoon or early evening. Exercise makes you feel awake so don't do it in the three hours before bed. A brisk walk for 20-30 minutes is as good as anything.

### **Food**



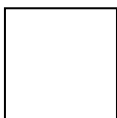
Try not to eat for about two hours before going to bed. As soon as you eat, your body starts to work to digest the food. You want it to be slowing down. If you are hungry, take a very light snack, e.g. a slice of toast. A banana, full of tryptophan, might help you get to sleep. Try not to eat during the night if you wake up.

### **Drink**



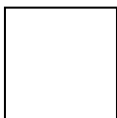
Try to drink as little as you can in the evening. This may stop you from waking to go to the toilet during the night.

### **Caffeine**



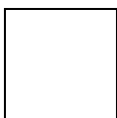
Caffeine is a stimulant. You get it in tea, coffee, fizzy drinks (like Irn-Bru and Coke), some headache tablets, energy tablets and drinks and painkillers. Try to cut down your caffeine intake across the day. Try to cut out as much as you can in the later afternoon and evening. Watch that you are not taking a lot of caffeine to keep you awake during the day.

### **Warm milky drinks**



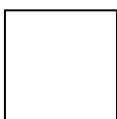
The old wives were right! Ovaltine, Horlicks or warm milk may help you get more deep sleep. Drink these instead of tea and coffee at night.

### **Smoking**



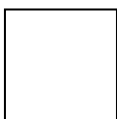
Nicotine, like caffeine, is a stimulant. It releases adrenaline into your body. This wakes you up and keeps you on the alert. Try not to smoke for at least 90 minutes before you go to bed as it takes this time for the effects to die down. Never smoke during the night if you wake up. If you are a heavy smoker, you would be best to give it up. Ask your GP or nurse for a place on the (free) NHS 'Stop Smoking' courses.

### **Alcohol**



If you rely on a night-cap to get over to sleep, you should stop this now. It may well get you over to sleep. But as the alcohol level in your blood drops, it will wake you again in 2 - 4 hours. It will then be hard to get over to sleep again. It also disrupts sleep rhythms and cuts down your REM and deep sleep (these are the stages of sleep you really need). Alcohol can make you more tense the next day. This, in turn, will make it harder to get to sleep the next night.

### **'Worry time'**



Set a time in the evening to deal with your worries. Do this well before your bedtime. So don't let yourself worry when you get into bed.

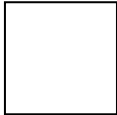
### **Arguments**



Try not to go to bed on an argument. Try to make up before you get into the bedroom.

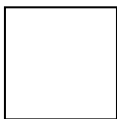
## Part 3: Build up good habits

### **Routine**



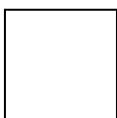
Give your body the chance to build up a routine. So go to bed at more or less the same time each night (unless you are working on 'Retraining your sleeping' – see later). Get up at more or less the same time. So try to avoid long lies. Build up a routine at night time that tells your body you are getting ready to sleep. Think of the routines you use for children going to bed – bath, pyjamas, story, etc. Adapt this to suit you. This lets you wind down after a long day.

### **Relax before bed**



Try to slow down in the hour before going to bed. Have a hot bath an hour or two before bed, listen to music, read a book. If you are on a back-shift or are studying for exams, don't go straight to bed from your work. Give yourself time to switch off.

### **Your partner**



If your partner snores or is restless, ask if he or she could move to another room or the sofa until you start to sleep better. **He or she** must move - not you - as you must learn to sleep well in your own bed.

## Part 4: Your sleeping needs

### Age

Most of us sleep around 7-8 hours each night. On the whole, we need less sleep as we grow older. Yet older people still try to sleep 7-8 hours. This may explain why many older people wake up in the latter parts of sleep.

### Life style

The amount of sleep you need also depends on your life-style. If you have young children who keep you on the go all day, you may need more sleep. If you are not active during the day, you may need less. Some people seem to thrive on only 4 hours a night.

So you have to find your own level. This may mean changing habits such as your usual bed-time.

### Pills

A lot of people think they need pills to get a sleep. Your GP will not give you sleeping pills for more than a few nights. They do not work in the long run. They often don't work in the short term. They change the kind of sleep you get. Don't depend on them. Sort out your sleep without them.

**Check which boxes you have ticked. Fill in the table on the next page. Write down how you will use these tips.**

<b>Sleep tip</b>	<b>How will you use this tip?</b>
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	
6)	

**Work hard at putting what you have learned into practice.**

**If you find your sleep is still poor, you should move to:**

## **Retraining your sleeping**

This very good skill will help you change your poor sleep pattern. It is not easy and asks a lot of you. But it is well worth it in the end.

***You must follow this approach to the letter.*** There are six stages:

### **STAGE 1: Don't go to bed until you feel sleepy**

Only go to bed once you start to feel sleepy. Don't go to bed because the others are going to bed, or because you feel bored or because it is 'bed-time'. You must stay up until you feel tired ***no matter how long this takes.***

### **STAGE 2: Your bedroom is only for sleeping**

This step gets rid of the things that keep you from sleep. While reading a book seems like a good idea, it is not. If you are reading, you are not sleeping, so it must go. So you should not read, watch TV, listen to the radio, write letters, phone friends, etc.

This does not include sex. Sex can help relax you and may help you get over to sleep.

As soon as you get into bed, put the light out and try to sleep. Though you may know good sleepers who read in bed or watch TV, you must do these things outside the bedroom at least until you get on top of the problems.

### **STAGE 3: If you don't fall asleep in 25 minutes, get up**

If you are not asleep in 25 minutes, you may not be asleep in 50. So after 25 minutes, go back to the living room. Don't watch TV. Don't eat or drink. Read a magazine rather than a book or listen to relaxing music. You must stay in the living room until you feel tired again, ***no matter how long this takes***. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

At the start, you will be up many times each night. It is hard to get out of a warm bed but you must do this.

**STAGE 4: Repeat (and repeat and repeat)**

Repeat Step 3 again and again, if you have to. So you have 25 minutes each time to get over. If you don't - it's back to the living room.

**STAGE 5: Get up early each morning**

Get up no later than 8.30am. Set the alarm and as soon as it goes off, get up and out of the bedroom.

Even if you feel that you have hardly slept a wink, you must follow this to the letter. You should also try to do this seven days a week, i.e. no lie-ins until you get this problem sorted out.

**STAGE 6: Don't try to catch up on sleep**

You may want to nap during the day to catch up on lost sleep, e.g. after a meal.

***Don't do it.*** Save the sleep for bedtime.

Work out when you most want to sleep during the day. Then work out a way of dealing with this - go out for a walk, phone a friend, etc.

**Keep at it**

This is a very good approach but it is also a hard one to follow. It makes great demands on you. It is very tempting to stay in bed after 25 minutes, to have a long lie or to have an afternoon nap because you can hardly keep your eyes open. Fight these urges the whole way.

Don't expect rapid change. Your poor sleep may have built up over a long time. So it will take time to get better.

### **Tackling other problems**

Many people find that having a problem with sleep is only one problem among others. If you feel you would like to tackle problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, panic, low self-confidence, etc., then **STEPS** might be able to help.

Ask at your GP practice for more information or take a look at our web site ([www.glasgowsteps.com](http://www.glasgowsteps.com)) to find out more.