

# The importance of sleep

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WPA

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World Sleep Day is an annual event which looks at important issues related to sleep. As you may know, it is recommended that most of us should have around eight hours of sleep a night to be able to function properly – although some people need more while others can get by on less.

According to [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) there are four elements to a good sleep.

1

Health



2

Environment



3

Attitude



4

Lifestyle



## 1. Health

Physical health issues can impede a good sleep. Make sure you're taking any appropriate medication by checking with your GP or pharmacist. Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression can also affect sleep.

## 2. Environment

It is recommended that we don't watch TV in bed – or use other electronic gadgets, such as playing computer games. Other common factors that can affect sleep include light, noise and temperature. Use a sleep mask and/or earplugs if light and noise are affecting you.

## 3. Attitude

If we are worrying about something we may find it harder to get to sleep, or wake up during the night and be unable to get back to sleep. Try some relaxation exercises or try taking several deep breaths – breathing in for seven, holding the breath for five and exhaling for eight.

## 4. Lifestyle

Although alcohol can make us feel tired and can sometimes help us to sleep, the quality of that sleep can be impaired. You may waken during the night needing to go to the toilet more frequently or needing to drink water due to dehydration. Food and drinks with lots of caffeine or sugar can also keep you awake.

Taking exercise on a regular basis can help us to sleep and can reduce anxiety and stress. Exercising earlier in the day is typically better for us.

## Sleep disorders

Insomnia means you are regularly unable to fall asleep – or stay asleep – for a long time. This can affect your mood, energy and emotions. One solution to this is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Regular daytime or early evening exercise can also help to overcome insomnia. Don't be tempted to take a nap during the day as that can make it more difficult to sleep at night.

Snoring affects over 40% of the adult population in the UK. It is a breathing problem rather than a sleep problem – and it is more of a problem for the person sharing a room with a snorer! Ways to combat snoring include sleeping on your side rather than on your back, drinking less alcohol, doing more exercise and/or addressing diet if you are overweight. Nasal strips are also available and may help.

## Conclusion

Quality sleep can help to support both mental and physical health, creativity, brain function and living longer. During sleep our brains flush out toxins we have built up during the day, including proteins linked to Alzheimer's disease.

While insomnia may be caused or increased by physical barriers or lifestyle, such as working shift patterns, having an uncomfortable bed or too much light, it can also be caused by psychological issues and/or worrying about problems that may seem insurmountable.

*Please note: The EAP/Health and Wellbeing Helpline is not available to family member(s) under 16 years of age. It is optional on Precision Corporate Healthcare and our large corporate schemes so please check your WPA literature carefully to see if you have this benefit.*