

## Sleep and Emotional Health

Sleep has a very close link with emotional health and wellbeing. Struggling with your emotional health can lead to issues with sleep, and poor sleep can negatively impact your emotional health. We know that, as a nation, the UK is chronically under slept.

### **Impacts of Sleep Deprivation**

Teenagers need an average of 8 – 10 hours of sleep a night to maintain their physical and emotional health. Lack of sleep also has significant impacts on academic performance and decision-making capabilities.

**Physical Impacts** – Sleep contributes to the effective function of virtually every system of the body. It empowers the immune system, helps regulate hormones, and enables muscle and tissue recovery.

**Emotional Impacts** – Most people have experienced how lack of sleep can affect mood, causing irritability and exaggerate emotional reactions. Over time, the consequences can be even greater for teens who are adapting to more independence, responsibility, and new social relationships.

**Academic Impacts** – Sleep benefits the brain and promotes attention, memory, and analytical thought. It makes thinking sharper, recognizing the most important information to consolidate learning. Sleep also facilitates expansive thinking that can spur creativity.

**Decision Making** - Sleep deprivation can affect the development of the frontal lobe, a part of the brain that is critical to control impulsive behaviour. Numerous studies have shown that teenagers who don't get enough sleep are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours.

### **Good Sleep Hygiene**

Good sleep hygiene means putting yourself in the best position to sleep well each and every night.

#### **1. Set your Sleep Schedule**

**Have a fixed wake up time** – regardless of whether it's a weekday or weekend, try to wake up at a similar time. A fluctuating schedule keeps you from getting into a rhythm of consistent sleep.

**Prioritise sleep** – don't skip sleep to study, socialise, exercise. Treat sleep as a vital part of keeping healthy. Calculate a target bedtime based on your wake up time and do your best to be ready for bed at that time each night.

**Make gradual adjustments** – if you need to shift your sleep time, try to do it gradually so it doesn't throw your whole schedule off. In the summer holidays, you may want to go to bed later and get up later. When the time comes to return to school, try adjusting your sleeping schedule by 30 minutes – 1 hour at a time, over a period of at least a week.

**Don't overdo it with naps** – naps can be a handy way to regain energy in the day, but they can throw off sleep at night. To avoid this, keep naps short and limited to the early afternoon.

#### **2. Follow a Nightly Routine**

**Keep your routine consistent** – following the same steps each night, like putting on pyjamas and brushing your teeth, can reinforce in your mind that its bedtime.

**Budget 30 minutes for winding down** – take advantage of whatever puts you in a state of calm, such as soft music, light stretching, reading and/or relaxation exercises.

**Dim your lights** – try to keep away from bright lights because they can hinder the production of melatonin, a hormone that the body creates to facilitate sleep.

**Unplug from electronics** – built in a 30 – 60-minute pre-bed buffer time that is device-free. Mobile phones, tablets and laptops create mental stimulation that is hard to shut off and generate blue light that may decrease melatonin production.

**Test methods of relaxation** – instead of making falling asleep your goal, it's often easier to focus on relaxation. Meditation, mindfulness, paced breathing and other relaxation techniques can put you in the right mindset for bed.

**Don't toss and turn** – it helps to have a mental connection between being in bed and actually being asleep. For that reason, if after 20 minutes you haven't gotten to sleep, get up, stretch, read or do something else calming in low light before trying to fall asleep again.

### 3. Cultivate Healthy Daily Habits

**Get daylight exposure** – light, especially sunlight, is one of the key drivers of circadian rhythms that can encourage quality sleep.

**Be physically active** – regular exercise can make it easier to sleep at night.

**Don't smoke/vape** - nicotine stimulates the body in ways that disrupt sleep.

**Cut down on caffeine in the afternoon and evening** – because it's a stimulant, caffeine can keep you wired even when you want to rest, so best to avoid it later in the day. It's also worth being conscious if you're consuming a lot of caffeine to make up for lack of sleep.

**Don't dine late** – eating dinner late can mean you're still digesting it when it's time for bed.

**Restrict in-bed activity** – to build a link in your mind between sleep and being in bed, it's best to only use your bed for sleep and not leisure activities like gaming or doing work on your laptop in bed.

### 4. Optimise your Bedroom

**Have a comfortable mattress and pillow** – the current recommendation is that mattresses should be replaced every 7 years and pillows every 2 years.

**Set a cool, yet comfortable, temperature** – cooler temperatures are recommended for better quality sleep.

**Block out light** – use heavy curtains or an eye mask to prevent light interrupting your sleep.

**Drown out noise** – ear plugs can stop noise from keeping you awake, but if you don't find them comfortable, you can try a white noise machine or a fan to drown out other sounds.

**Try calming scents** – light smells, such as lavender, may induce a calmer state of mind and help cultivate a positive space for sleep.

The basic concept of sleep hygiene – that your environment and habits can be optimised for better sleep – applies to everyone, but what ideal sleep hygiene looks like can vary from person to person. Therefore, it's worth testing out different things suggested to see what is the most beneficial for you. You don't need to change everything at once, but small steps can help you move towards a better and more consistent sleep routine, which will ultimately benefit your wellbeing and productivity.

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