

# How do I manage INSOMNIA?



## What is insomnia?

Insomnia means having difficulty falling or staying asleep and can be experienced by anybody at one time or another.

## Why is insomnia important to talk about?

Sleeping difficulties can be really common when you have an illness. You might be kept awake by the symptoms that you have or thoughts or questions about your illness or treatment. When your sleep is interrupted, it can affect your relationships, how you feel and your day to day functioning.

## How can you use this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed to provide you with information and some handy tips that you can use to help you improve your sleep. At the end of the toolkit there are also links to further information and support if you wish to explore this area in more detail.



## General principles of the topic to consider

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It is common for people to experience short term sleep difficulties, such as difficulty sleeping the night before a hospital procedure or appointment. It is also understandable that parents of babies and young children may also have disturbed sleep. People vary from one another in the amount of sleep they need, this also changes across the lifespan with people generally requiring less sleep as they get older.

For many people, when they start to notice that they are losing sleep, they can start to worry, e.g. "I won't be able to get everything done that I need to tomorrow". This can mean that's its harder to sleep if you are feeling more tense and worried. Short term solutions that include napping in the day and drinking more caffeine can make sleeping difficulties last longer, as your body is unable to develop a good sleep routine.

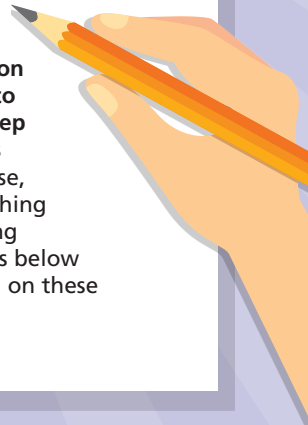
This cycle of negative thoughts and unhelpful behaviours can exacerbate insomnia, the good news is that there are lots of things that you can try to help improve your sleep, see below for some suggestions.



# Top tips and strategies

Here are some techniques that you can try to help reduce your insomnia:

- 1 Get into a regular routine of going to bed** each night and getting up each morning – this will help your body to establish a pattern.
- 2 Do regular physical activity**, pace this as to what feels manageable. You may find the need to vary this on different days and at different points of your treatment, if applicable.
- 3 Keep your bed for sleep** – avoid doing other stimulating activities in bed, such as work or eating, as you will start to associate your bed with non-sleep related activities.
- 4 Eat a balanced diet and avoid caffeine in the hours before bed** – caffeine can last in your system for several hours, so try to substitute afternoon/evening caffeinated drinks with alternatives, such as herbal tea.
- 5 Avoid using your mobile phone or computer in bed** – these devices can act as a stimulant for the mind, making it harder for us to switch off and go to sleep. Try reading or practicing some relaxation techniques instead to help you wind down.
- 6 Be aware of the impact of daytime naps** – some people find if they nap during the day, they have difficulty sleeping at night. Be aware of any patterns in taking daytime naps and having night time sleep difficulties and try to adjust this as is helpful.
- 7 Keep a sleep diary** – be aware of what foods, activity, mood, environmental factors are helpful or disruptive for your sleep pattern, and adjust what you can.
- 8 Be aware of the side effects of medications** – you may experience side effects from certain medications prescribed for your health condition which impact your sleep e.g. drowsiness, or hot flushes. Speak to your healthcare team about potential side effects and seek their advice for timing doses and managing side effects.
- 9 Use relaxation techniques to help you sleep** – there are numerous techniques you can use, including using breathing relaxation and calming imagery– see the links below for more information on these techniques.



# Top tips and strategies

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**10 Write down worries which may be keeping you awake.** Keep a notepad and pen by the side of your bed, writing the worry down will help reassure you that it won't get forgotten so you can act on it in the morning if required; many worries are easier to negotiate during the day versus at night when you can feel more isolate with your worrying thoughts.

**11 Challenge unhelpful thoughts** - often we become caught up in the cycle of negative thinking, as outlined above. By reminding ourselves that 'thoughts are not facts' and focusing on more relaxing thoughts to help sleep rather than getting caught in cycle of worry and frustration about not

being able to sleep may be helpful to you – see the links below for more information on this.

**12 Establish a bedtime routine** – having a relaxing bath and listening to some calming music can help you get in to a sleep mind set.

**13 Be aware that changing routines and practicing thought challenging and relaxation techniques all get easier with practice.**



# WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

1

**There is a more detailed booklet on 'Overcoming Insomnia'** – this was developed

for cancer patients however contains general information and management tips applicable to all and is free to download from the UHB website: <http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/files/nhs-ubht/insomnia%20booklet.pdf>.

2

**Access the patient resource pages** – there are additional guides on reducing stress and

anxiety for instance, which may help you to improve your sleep pattern. For more information on relaxation techniques and guided relaxation audio, visit the UH Bristol page: <http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/your-hospitals/bhoc/information-and-support/useful-resources/>.

3

**Speak to your medical team if you are experiencing troubling side effects, they may be able to offer ideas to help alleviate symptoms, such as pain, which may then help to improve your sleep pattern.**

4

**Ask your medical team if there is access to a psychologist**

within your team who may be able to signpost you to further resources or support and/or provide you with individual therapy to help address underlying difficulties associated with insomnia, e.g. anxiety. Or speak to your GP, who may be able to signpost or refer you to an appropriate service.



# WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

## Links to appropriate resources

### 1. Centre for Clinical Interventions information sheets:

- a. 'Facts about sleep'
- b. 'What is Insomnia'
- c. 'Insomnia and your thinking'
- d. 'Sleep hygiene'

All are available from: <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Sleep>

2. Macmillan 'Difficulty Sleeping' information sheet, which includes tips for improving sleep: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/other-side-effects/difficulty-sleeping.html>.

3. 'Moodjuice' website and downloadable self-help guides are produced by Choose Life Falkirk and the Adult Clinical Psychology Service, NHS Forth Valley. There are various guides for improving wellbeing, including managing sleep problems: <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/SleepProblems.asp>.

4. Mind website contains information and tips entitled 'How to cope with sleep problems' with a downloadable PDF: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/what-are-sleep-problems/#.V1V7NzUrJhE>.

5. 'The Sleep Book' by Guy Meadows is a self-help book which may be of benefit for more information and tips: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/19686378-the-sleep-book>.



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information about psychology services please go to:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/>

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

For this leaflet in large print, audio or PDF format, please email [patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk](mailto:patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk)

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