

Kowhai Programme

Support for patients, families & carers

Sleep Hygiene (Getting a good nights sleep)

Sleep is not a luxury but an essential human need. Sleep is important for immune, endocrine and metabolic functions. Poor sleep affects health and wellbeing. Disturbed sleep is usually the result of multiple factors some reversible and others not.

Your personal habits:

- Ensure your pain medication is adequate.
- Get yourself into regular sleep habits: Try and go to sleep at a regular time. If you go to sleep at differing times your 'body clock' or brains ability to help control your ability to get off to sleep will not 'kick in'. Having a regular sleep time will assist this.
- Go to bed before midnight: you might get a 'second wind' after midnight and therefore find it difficult to fall asleep.
- Rest and recharge: avoid naps during the day if possible. If you do nap limit how long for (e.g. 30 minutes) and avoid napping after 2 pm.
- A quiet time away from distractions may help refresh you.
- Manage your energy – have frequent rest breaks when doing tasks.
- Choose non-alcoholic beverages: alcohol has a sleep-inducing effect – as the level of alcohol lessens in your body it becomes a stimulant/has a wake-up effect.
- Choose non-caffeinated beverages: water, herbal teas, milky drinks. Caffeinated drinks are stimulants (e.g. coffee, tea, some fizzy drinks and chocolate).
- Avoid heavy meals before bed (especially spicy, sugary foods 4 – 6 hours before going to bed.
- Avoid going to bed hungry – tummy rumbles might wake you.
- Choose to be smoke free: nicotine is a stimulant so avoid smoking prior to going to bed.
- Exercise (walking/stretching) at least 4 – 6 hours before bedtime.
- Quiet time before going to bed to help you relax (such as a warm bath, listening to a relaxation CD/easy listening music) can assist with sleep.

Your sleeping environment:

- Have a comfortable bed and bedding.
- Keep the temperature in the bedroom moderate (not too hot or too cold).
- Block out distracting noise and light.
- Bed for sleep and intimacy – let your body know that the bedroom is associated with sleeping/intimacy/relaxing not an office or TV watching spot.
- If you are a clock watcher during the night – hide the clock.

Getting ready for bed:

- Try a light snack before bed: Foods high in amino acid tryptophan such as bananas, peanut butter, and warm milk may help you to sleep.
- Practice relaxation techniques before bed: such as deep breathing and visualisation.
- Leave your worries out of the bedroom: assign a 'worry period' during the evening or late afternoon to deal with these issues. Make lists or plans for the next day – this will help reduce you thinking about them during the night.
- Get into your favourite sleeping position: If you do not fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, get up and go into another room and do something quiet and not stimulating for 10 minutes then return to bed and try again.

Getting to sleep and waking in the night:

Most people do wake once or twice in the night. If you cannot go back to sleep within 15-20 minutes, then get out of bed. Leave the bedroom. Have a light snack, do a quiet activity (e.g. a relaxation technique) then go back to bed. Do not perform challenging or engaging activity such as watching TV, house work. Keep to the daytime routine and plan:

Always get up at the same time and continue with what your plan is for the day. Avoiding activities because you did not sleep well may reinforce another sleepless night.

Anyone who experiences sleep disruption for more than a month should talk with their GP.