

Kōwhai Programme

Support for whānau & carers

Rest, Relax, Sleep

Sleep is not a luxury but an essential human need. Sleep is important for good health and wellbeing. However don't get so focused on the need to sleep that worrying about it disturbs your sleep!

Disturbed sleep is usually the result of multiple reasons, some changeable 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. Your internal body clock and hormones that control sleepiness and wakefulness work best when you have a regular sleep routine.
- 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. However if you tend to snooze in the evening a nap before 3pm may be helpful. If you do nap limit how long for (e.g. 30 minutes)
- Ensuring exposure to sunlight or bright light during the day, and having dim lighting in the evening helps to keep your circadian rhythms healthy, helping you have a better sleep.
- Even light activity during the day can help you sleep better at night but avoid active exercise within 3 hours of going to bed.
- Choose non-alcoholic drinks: alcohol has a sleep-inducing effect – as the level of alcohol lessens in your body it has a wake-up effect.
- Choose non-caffeinated drinks: water, herbal teas, milky drinks. Caffeinated drinks are stimulants (e.g. coffee, tea, kombucha, some fizzy drinks and chocolate).
- Avoid heavy meals, especially spicy or sugary foods, within 2 hours of going to bed, but a light snack can avoid going to bed with a 'rumbly tummy', and help you sleep better.
- Choose to be smoke free: nicotine is a stimulant so avoid smoking prior to going to bed.
- Quiet time before going to bed to help you relax (such as a warm bath, listening to a relaxation CD/ easy listening music) can help sleep.
- Avoid blue light exposure for 2 hours before bed. Either switch to a night time (blue light blocked) setting or, better still, put devices away.

Your sleeping environment:

- Have a comfortable bed and bedding.
- Keep the temperature in the bedroom mild. This is different for everyone but usually between 15–20°C.
- 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. Consider some of the suggestions below.
- 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 something quiet (e.g. a relaxation technique) then go back to bed. Don't do something busy or active such as watching TV or 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 as much as possible. Avoiding activities because you did not sleep well may lead to another sleepless night.
- Anyone who experiences sleep problems for more than a month should talk with their GP.

Sleep Aids

Some foods may help you get to sleep and/or stay asleep because of what they contain:

Almonds and walnuts have high doses of melatonin and magnesium.

Tryptophan is present in small amounts in most protein foods and in higher amounts in yoghurt, milk, oats, bananas, dates, poultry, eggs and peanuts.

In a recent study kiwifruit was suggested to be helpful in both getting to sleep and staying asleep.

Herbal teas are very effective for some. There are a number available and an inexpensive 'Sleep' tea in the herbal tea section of the supermarket has been reported as effective.

Pharmacies and Health food shops offer Lavender Oil, Magnesium, Chamomile, Tart Cherry, Ginkgo Biloba, all of which have been reported as useful tools for aiding sleep. Seek advice from one of their team on what might suit you best.

ENDING LIFE WELL

A podcast series for carers

<https://otagohospice.co.nz/patient-services/kowhai-programme/carers-podcast/>

You might like to listen to this topic on the Ending Life Well Podcast available on most podcast sites and on the Otago Community Hospice webpage.

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Te Kahu Pairuri ki Ōtākou
Living Every Moment