

## Sleep

**“Tossing and turning for hours on end. No matter what I try to do, I can’t seem to get off to sleep.”**

Sleep problems are very common and affect people in different ways. There is no “right” amount of sleep, it is different between people as they grow up. Problems sleeping can happen for a number of reasons: a result of age, medical reasons, emotional reasons, unhelpful surroundings, and disturbed sleep. There are different sorts of sleep problems. It is also possible that you believe you have a sleep problem when in fact you are getting enough sleep, but it is different from what you expect.

### Why is it vital?

Sleep allows the body and mind to recover, repair and revitalize from the daily stresses. A surge of total energy for the health and wellbeing. Sleep problems are common and often referred to as insomnia.



Sufficient sleep means that our cognitive (memory, thinking, decision-making and language) functions can be more effective. Also, creativity, productivity, emotional stability and concentration are enhanced.

### How much sleep do we need?

People become very distressed when they feel they are not getting a good night’s sleep, which makes it harder to get up. But, what is the normal amount? How much sleep do we need? The answer varies greatly in their need for sleep. The popular idea is 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night. **This is not true.** Many studies show that people range between needing 4 hours to 10 hours or more every night. The amount of sleep varies throughout their life.

### Stages of sleep:

The cycle of sleep begins with preparation for going to sleep, quietening our minds and bodies. No one goes through the stages sequentially, they happen around four to five times a night.

- **Preparation:** Getting ready to sleep
- **Stage 1:** Light stage of sleep that lasts for five minutes
- **Stage 2:** Lasts for 20 mins and the brain produces bursts of fast and rhythmic activity. The heart rate slows and temperature decreases
- **Stage 3:** People become less responsive to stimuli in the environment. A transition between light and deep sleep.
- **Stage 4:** Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. Where there is a lot more activity, e.g. movement, fast breathing but the muscles become relaxed. There is likely to be dreaming and increased brain activity. REM sleep happens for an hour before the person can return to Stage 2, 3 and then repeats the cycle.

## What disrupts sleep patterns?

- *Physiological Factors*: hypertension, cardiovascular risks, obesity, alcohol, and other substances that can negatively impact sleep.
- *Environmental Issues*: room temperature, noise levels and the amount of light available can be disruptive.
- *Depression and Emotional* problems can also affect sleep.
- Short term sleep difficulties can be caused by *stress*. It's one of the effects of being stressed, it comes as problematic if the sleep problem is not managed properly during stressful period.
- Some *medicines* can cause sleep difficulties.



What sort of sleep problem do you have? Tick the boxes that apply to you

- Getting to sleep

The most common sleep problem is trouble getting to sleep. For some people it can take several hours to drop off to sleep, but once they are asleep they quality of sleep is good.

- Staying asleep

The next common problem is a disturbed sleep pattern, with frequent waking in the middle of the night and difficulty getting back to sleep.

- Waking up too early

A third problem is waking earlier than is desired, again with difficulty getting back to sleep.

- Poor quality of sleep

Some people report sleeping lightly, with restless, disturbed and inconsistent sleep. Knowing exactly what sort of sleep problem you have can help when it comes to trying to deal with it.

## Health Habits and Practices:

- Try to maintain a regular sleep/wake schedule. Identify what is the best and most natural time for you to go to sleep and wake up. Try and re-introduce this slowly, e.g. by going to sleep half an hour later than you have been.
- Exercise regularly at least half an hour a day, e.g. walking, running. Avoid doing exercise two to three hours before you plan to go to sleep.
- Avoid using screen technology, such as smart phone, TV, or laptop for at least an hour before sleeping. The high proportion of blue light in those screens tells the brain that it is morning and suppresses the release of melatonin, the hormone necessary to make you fall asleep. Instead, use bedside lamps that have a high proportion of red light in their spectrum, as our brain is wired to interpret red light as “sunset” and “time to sleep” (as opposed to blue light as “sunrise” and “time to wake up”).
- Eat and drink healthily. At high altitudes it is important to drink sufficient fluids, e.g. water and eat carbohydrates. Please consult a health care practitioner if you are going to change your diet significantly. Avoid stimulating beverages, such as coffee or caffeinated tea after 5pm.
- Smoking near bedtime or if you awake in the night is not helpful.
- Ensure that your night-time environment has positive stimuli, e.g. low light, reasonable temperature.
- Keep a note book by your bed and write down any worries or concerns that you might have and tell yourself you will deal with them in the morning. Make sure that you do tackle the worries as much as you can.

***For further information or a confidential discussion, please contact Staff Welfare at [swo@iom.int](mailto:swo@iom.int)***

## References:

Distress Factors and Reactions: a human approach to challenging behaviours. 2018

“Sleeping Problems- A self help guide.” Sheffield Health and Social Care, NHS,

[www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/iapt/sheffield/leaflets/selfhelp/Sleeping%20Problems.pdf](http://www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/iapt/sheffield/leaflets/selfhelp/Sleeping%20Problems.pdf).