



Sleep - Self Help Pick and Mix

Try to challenge unhelpful habits

Alcohol and caffeine can disturb your sleep. So can heavy meals late at night. Falling asleep in front of the TV is usually a disaster.

Tackle any practical issues flagged up by your sleep diary

For example are you too hot, too cold, uncomfortable, hungry? Is it too noisy or too light?

Keep a worry diary by the bed

If thoughts, worries, questions or ideas are whirling around your head write them down and close the book.

Make yourself a refuge to go to if you can't sleep

Set up a place to go to if you can't sleep. You might want to have a rug to keep warm, leave out a drink and something absorbing but undemanding to do. You could try a book or magazine, one woman put out her old photos for sorting. Don't lie there panicking if you have a bad night but get up and go to your refuge. Go back to bed when you feel tired.

Exercise during the day

There is evidence that moderate exercise during the day helps you to sleep, especially if it involves being outdoors. Some sleep experts advise against strenuous exercise in the evening.

Practice relaxation exercises

Sit or lie comfortably and take 10 minutes to practice relaxation. You could buy a relaxation tape, practice tensing and then relaxing each muscle group or use controlled breathing (count 1001,1002,1003,1004 as you breathe in and then count down 1004, 1003, 1002, 1001 as you breathe out). Some people find that listening to music helps. Your relaxation time does not have to be at bedtime to help with sleep. If you are worried about getting to sleep, you might find it easier to practice relaxation during the day.

Challenge yourself to get into a regular sleep routine

Try to go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day, whether you have slept well or not. Try to avoid anything more than a 25 minute nap during the day. Remember small steps, if you want to change your bedtime by a lot then you probably need to do it slowly half an hour at a time.

Make a bedtime routine for yourself

This is a way of sending a message to your mind and body that the day is ending and you are going to rest. What you build into your routine is very personal to you. Some people find a bath helps, or a milky drink or camomile tea or lavender oil. If you try over the counter remedies it is a good idea to check with the pharmacist that they are OK with any medication you take.

Listen to something you enjoy at bedtime

Some people use a radio alarm for this or you could try a talking book. Self help books suggest that if you listen to music it can work best if you make a tape for yourself of music you enjoy. Watching TV is not a substitute because your brain doesn't have to focus in the same way and so it does not lead to relaxation.

Change your room around in some way

If you have had bad nights for a long time you can come to associate your bedroom with struggling to sleep. It can help to change the way the room looks in some way to give a feeling of a fresh start - even just rearranging pictures or a different colour duvet. Most sleep experts advise against having non-sleep related things eg TVs in the room. That may not be practical but try to have one area of the room obviously for sleep.

Remember to take small steps and stick with them. Some of these ideas will help you, alongside treatment for your depression. None of them are quick fixes. You need to keep going with them for a few weeks to get the benefit.