

# Sleep

## Understanding your sleep patterns

Most sleep problems can be helped by simple changes to your daily and night-time routines.

These guidelines will show you what you can do to help yourself. Your doctor should be consulted if insomnia persists for more than a few weeks despite following a sensible routine.



### **What time do you go to bed?**

Do you go to bed at about the same time on most nights, and does this allow enough time for a good eight hours' rest before you have to get up?

### **Do you go to bed at a reasonable time but cannot get to sleep?**

Perhaps you need to look at what you do to relax before bed. You may be a natural 'owl', alert late in the evening and sleepy in the morning, but your body clock can be retrained to give an earlier onset of sleep. Start by going to bed a bit earlier, when feeling tired, and then retiring 15-to-30 minutes earlier each day until the desired time is reached.

### **Do you wake in the night?**

If this is due to breathing problems, severe snoring, recurrent pain, or the frequent need to pass urine you need to see your doctor to check if you have any underlying medical problems. If you simply have trouble getting back to sleep, analyse what you are thinking about that keeps you awake.

If you find that you are regularly waking up in the early hours for no reason and then can't get back to sleep, this too may be worth discussing with your doctor. It may help to get some advice about managing stress and pressure so that worries do not disturb your sleep. If you suddenly wake thinking about things you need to do, keep a pad and pen by your bed to write them down. That way you won't forget them and you can relax and go back to sleep.

Avoid alcoholic nightcaps because these can lead to sleep disturbance as the sedative effect wears off. Heavy meals late at night will keep you awake, but on the other hand, going to bed hungry will not help either! If you have to eat late, make it a light, easily digestible meal.

### **Do you wake too early in the morning and then tire later in the day?**

If you go to bed at the normal time but are waking early you are unlikely to be getting enough sleep. So go to bed earlier still. It is better to get up when you wake up and go to bed when tired. If external factors, such as noise or light are the cause of the early waking, try and deal with them to minimise their impact. Blinds or heavier curtains, or sleeping in a different room are possible ways of dealing with these issues.

If this is not practical, exposure to bright light in the afternoon and early evening will delay the onset of sleep, which should result in you waking later in the morning. If you wake early because you are worried about something, consider relaxation and/or seeking some pressure management advice. If it's a hungry, wet infant demanding early morning attention, try to get a nap to catch up on your rest later in the day

# Sleep

## Understanding your sleep patterns contd.

### **How did you sleep and how did you feel when you woke up?**

If you slept well and awoke feeling refreshed you are probably getting enough sleep, even if this is less than average. If you did not feel refreshed despite a long enough sleep, you may need some advice about improving the quality of your sleep. Make sure you have a comfortable, supportive mattress and a pillow that supports your neck. If you disturb your partner's sleep with snoring as well, you need to see your doctor in case this is due to sleep apnoea. It can be treated. Keep monitoring your sleep with a diary so you can judge the effectiveness of different things and find what is best for you.

