



SLEEP AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Sleep is an important resource that keeps you healthy, mentally sharp, and able to cope with stress more effectively. Unfortunately, stressed people tend to get less sleep than they need. In this fact sheet learn some of the reasons why poor mental health and sleep deprivation seem to go together, and important techniques for getting the sleep you need.

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Pressure turns into stress when you feel unable to cope. People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may provide enough pressure to be motivating to someone else.

Stress and anxiety are common causes of insomnia. Insomnia is defined as difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep for long enough to feel refreshed the next morning, even though you've had enough opportunity to sleep.

A common symptom of depressed mood is the problem of waking early in the morning and the inability to fall back to sleep. This in turn leads to fatigue during the day which exacerbates the low mood due to the inability to enjoy pleasurable activity. So fatigue and sleep disturbance is something often reported by people who are depressed.

For sleep problems, try these helpful techniques:

- keep to a regular healthy night time routine including a wind down period (see Sleep Hygiene handout)
- one great way to purge your body of stress so your mind can relax, is to learn progressive muscle relaxation and deep muscle relaxation techniques
- meditation or mindfulness is also a valuable tool to relax your body and quiet your mind to transition you into sleep. Try Headspace which offers mindfulness mediation in bite size ten minute exercises. It's easy to follow and is delivered through an app or online and it's been shown to reduce stress, improve sleep and even increase focus.
- a great way for many people to relax before sleep is sexual activity. It can give you a dose of relaxing hormones and provide several other stress management benefits
- if you are worried about something, often it makes us feel stressed. List your concerns and leave the list outside of the bedroom – it's a way of 'putting the day to rest'
- communicate your concerns to a friend or relative – this can help put your worries and stresses into perspective.

As well as stress keeping us awake at night – if we are sleep deprived we are more likely to become stressed, anxious and depressed so it is really important that we all get sufficient good quality sleep.

If you are feeling anxious and stressed try calling your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) service who can help you discuss your concerns and also explore techniques to improve your sleep. Good sleep is essential for good mental health!