

TIPS FOR A RESTFUL NIGHT

Sleep aids

- Look at your sleeping arrangements. Is your bed and bedding comfortable? Do the temperature and light levels suit you? Is there enough fresh air in the room? If you are easily bothered by noise, try using earplugs.
- Try setting aside some time during the early evening for reflecting on your day. Think over any difficulties and write down your next step. Making an action list early in the evening may help you to avoid focusing on problems when you go to bed.
- Try to wind down during the later part of the evening. Avoid any complicated work or activity.
- If your brain is still busy with daytime concerns, listening to the radio quietly for a while may distract you.
- Try having a warm bath, to help you unwind.
- Practise a relaxation technique before you go to bed. Breathe slowly and deeply: four seconds in, hold for four seconds and then four seconds out. Consciously tense and relax your muscles, in turn; start with your toes and work up.
- Hop pillows, or a few drops of lavender oil in the bath or on your pillow, may help you relax.
- A hot, milky drink may encourage sleep.
- If you feel physically exhausted, but your mind is full of racing, intrusive thoughts, don't try to force sleep, it will only make you feel more anxious. Try keeping your eyes open, instead, and as they start to close, tell yourself to resist. The more you try to stay awake, the sleepier you'll become.
- Interrupt unwanted thoughts by repeating a soothing word (such as 'peace') over and over to yourself.
- Try visualising a scene or landscape that has pleasant memories for you.
- If you wake during the night, go through your relaxation routine.

Life-style improvements

- Avoid coffee, tea, cocoa, cola and other drinks containing caffeine. Try decaffeinated coffee and herbal teas instead.
- Limit alcohol in the evening to one or two units.
- Get enough exercise. Fit people sleep better, on the whole, and if you haven't had any exercise during the day, it will be more difficult to sleep soundly. Consider changing your habits and going for a walk in the early evening.
- Eat only a light meal in the evening, and avoid snacks.
- Yoga and meditation are also useful methods for combating stress.

If you are stretched to the limit during the day, doing a stressful job and taking on too many responsibilities, you are unlikely to sleep well. Insomnia can be a symptom of other, more general difficulties, and you may need to improve your assertiveness, time-management and decision-making skills.

