

## **INSOMNIA and sleep problems**

Insomnia, being unable to sleep – or the perceived lack of sleep can be very distressing.

Natural sleep helps us re-cooperate mentally and physically, process emotions and sort and file our memories.

Natural sleep is a memory builder.

Drug induced sleep is not natural. You do not get the healing benefits of sleep. Drugs cause sedation (the DVLA has rules on driving and the use of these medications), hangover effects, risk of addiction and increased risk of falls in the elderly.

Studies have shown that, on average, you only fall asleep 20 minutes earlier with these medications.

Drug induced sleep is a memory eraser.

Take a look at these 12 Tips on sleep as per Matthew Walker author of 'Why we sleep – the New science of sleep and dreams' Penguin 2017

**1. Stick to a sleep routine** – Go to bed and wake at the same time everyday – including weekends!!! Use a bedtime app on your phone to remind you to go to bed.

Trying to make up for sleep you lost in the week at the weekend doesn't work. It also makes it much harder to wake up on Monday.

THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF ADVICE.

**2. Exercise** - Exercise is great but not within 2-3 hours of bedtime.

Otherwise try to do 30 mins of aerobic exercise on most days.

**3. Avoid caffeine and Nicotine** – Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, coke, tea chocolate etc. Its effects last up to 8 hours – so avoid after midday! De-caffeinated products are low caff not NO caff!

Nicotine is a stimulant that causes light sleep – smokers often wake up early due to nicotine withdrawal.

**4. Avoid alcohol** – heavy alcohol use robs you of REM sleep. Loss of REM sleep results in a 50% drop in memory retention.

It may also impair your breathing during your sleep causing you to wake frequently.

Often people wake in the middle of the night when the effects of the alcohol have worn off.

**5. Avoid large meals and drinks late at night** - can cause indigestion and getting up in the night to urinate.

Steer away from carbohydrates late at night – especially sugar.

**6. Medications** – some Blood pressure or asthma medications can disrupt sleep – check with your pharmacist if you are concerned.

Over the counter use of cough medicine, decongestants, antihistamines etc. may also disrupt sleep patterns.

**7. Don't take any naps after 3pm** - short early naps can help make up for lost sleep, but long and late will make it harder to fall asleep the next night.

**8. Relax before bed** – give yourself time to unwind, relax, read or listen to music before bed.

**9. Take a hot bath before bed** - the drop in body temperature when you get out of the bath may help you feel sleepy. The bath also helps you to relax.

**10. Dark, cool, gadget-free bedroom** - get rid of anything distracting such as noises, bright lights or an uncomfortable bed. You sleep better if your bedroom is cool, about 18 degrees is ideal.

TV's, mobile phones and tablets etc. are distracting and emit stimulating blue LED light which delays melatonin production (a natural sleep promoter).

Sleep tracking devices can be inaccurate, as they often interpret being asleep but moving as you being awake. Don't use them as the main measure of sleep quality.

Don't clock watch – turn your bedside clocks face away out of view.

**11. Have the right amount of sun exposure** – daylight is the key to regulating sleep patterns.

Ensure you have at least 30 mins of natural sunlight, outside every day.

Try to wake up to sunlight or very bright lights and in the evening turn the lights down before bedtime.

**12. Don't lie in bed awake** - if you are still lying in bed awake after 20 mins, or are starting to get anxious, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy.  
Getting anxious about not sleeping makes it harder to drop off.  
Try mindfulness techniques, Yoga etc.

Sleep restriction technique

Try to restrict time in bed to the time you are usually actually asleep, rather than being in bed not sleeping. i.e. if you go to bed at 11pm but don't sleep until 1 am then wake at 7am that is 6 hours sleep.  
You should go to bed at 1am, and still set alarm to wake at 7am for 2 weeks. If you feel sleep deprived move the time you go to bed forward by 30 mins. This technique may make you feel tired in the short term but will enhance depth and quality of sleep over longer periods.

Talk to your health care provider if you think your sleep problem is secondary to pain; depression, anxiety or physical causes such as sleep apnoea.

For more info look at

[www.patient.co.uk/health/Insomnia-Poor-Sleep.htm](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Insomnia-Poor-Sleep.htm)