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Handy Fact Sheet
Insomnia and sleep hygiene

What the problem is:	Why it is important to you:	How you can help yourself:
• Poor sleep makes you feel tired, affect your mental health and cause physical problems.	• If you do not feel alert in the morning you may need to sleep better.	• Follow sleep hygiene • This makes sure nothing is keeping you awake that can be changed.

What is insomnia?

- Finding it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep
- Not waking up feeling refreshed and do not feel alert during the next day

Sleep is vital to allow the body to recover and repair itself. A good sleep should feel "restorative" or refreshing the next day.

There are three main types of insomnia:

- Transient - lasting less than a week. It is often caused by depression, anxiety or stress
- Intermittent - poor sleep for a few days over several weeks
- Chronic or primary insomnia – poor sleep lasting for longer than a month.

The important thing is to have the right sleep length for you:

- This might vary from 4 to 10 hours
- The **important thing is how alert you feel during the day**, and how awake you feel
- If you don't sleep much but feel refreshed and feel alert for most of the day, then you are probably having enough sleep.

Is lack of sleep a problem?

Lack of sleep can be serious for some people.

- Transient insomnia for less than a week or so is not usually a problem
- If your sleep is poor for longer it could mean you end up with worse mental health problems
- You might start taking drugs (including alcohol) to help you sleep
- You might cope less well with stress, have depression and anxiety and have accidents
- There can also be physical health problems e.g. you are more likely to put on weight, get diabetes, and have more infections and heart problems.

What causes poor sleep?

Insomnia is often a symptom of other illnesses rather than an "illness" in its own right. It can be caused by many things:

- Mental health problems such as depression, ADHD, mania, PTSD, anxiety, stress, life events and parasomnias such as nightmares
- Drugs e.g. non-prescribed (such as nicotine, caffeine, ephedrine, illicit drugs), and prescribed (such as some antidepressants, lamotrigine, beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, stimulants, some asthma treatments, some anti-inflammatories)
- Physical illness e.g. heart disease, breathing problems (e.g. sleep apnoea), incontinence, bowel problems, hormone changes, brain injury, pain (e.g. arthritis, back pain), infections, and restless legs
- Sleep can get worse as you get older, insomnia is more common in women, a history of light sleeping, shift work, jet lag, work or financial problems, and external reasons such as too much noise or light at bedtime can stop you sleeping.

Please see our website for a full list of possible causes and for more information about sleep hygiene.

What can I do about poor sleep?

- Sleep hygiene is a series of steps you can take to give you the best chance of getting to sleep naturally - see over the page
- Sleep hygiene isn't scientifically proven but if you **don't** follow any of these steps then getting to sleep will be more difficult.

If all this doesn't help then there are other things you can try:

- There are some psychological treatments e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, alternative therapies
- If all else fails, you can try sleeping tablets
- Please see our website for more information.

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Sleep hygiene helps you get to sleep naturally

	**Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine, especially in the three hours before going to bed**	• Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, colas and chocolate • A hot milky drink (decaffeinated of course!) at bedtime may help • Alcohol may help you get off to sleep but it breaks up the second half of sleep so you feel less refreshed in the morning • Alcohol can also make you wee more, and this can wake you up • Nicotine can be a stimulant and keep you awake. Some smokers find smoking helps them relax so work out what is best for you.
	**Do not stay in bed for more than about an hour if you are not asleep**	• Get up for a short while and then go back to bed again • But don't watch television or check your phone.
	**Avoid daytime naps or long periods of sitting around**	• Try to keep active during the day – exercise helps release growth hormone which helps overall functioning • Get at least 8 hours natural daylight so your brain knows there has been a day.
	**Make sure that the bed and bedroom are comfortable**	• People tend to sleep better in colder rooms but keeping your hands and feet warm help some people • Avoid excess noise and temperature. Ear-plugs may help if there is a lot of noise • The scent of lavender in a bedroom can help sleep • Leaving a radio or iPod with speakers on with soft familiar music may help if there are noises you can't ignore.
	**Have a regular bedtime routine**	• A warm bath or exercise a few hours before bedtime can help • Avoid heavy exercise or mental activity within 2 hours of bedtime.
	**Get up at the same time every morning, no matter how well or long you slept**	• This is easier said than done but this makes sure that you are ready for sleep the next night • If you sleep in after a poor night's sleep it will be harder to fall asleep the next night.
	**Carbohydrate can help sleep**	• Some carbohydrate e.g. pasta can help but do not eat a big meal within about two hours of going to bed • Sugar may stop you sleeping, as can some vitamin supplements.
	**Do not look at back-lit screens for an hour before bedtime**	• Back-lit screens produce a blue light with a wave length that stops your brain releasing melatonin. Melatonin is the brain's trigger to go to sleep. Less melatonin means it is harder to fall asleep • Back-lit screens include televisions, computers, iPads and phones • Kindles are OK because the screen isn't lit from behind • Just dimming the lights or screens can help • Wearing yellow glasses or clip-ons in the evening cuts down the blue light and solves the problem
	**Try to relax and don't worry about it too much before going to bed**	• Little is more likely to keep you awake than worrying about getting to sleep • Yoga exercises and use of relaxation tapes can help you relax, as can meditation, a warm bath and reading a book at bedtime • Listening to gentle music can help distract your thoughts.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about sleep, insomnia and sleep hygiene. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how medicines work, doses and about the conditions.

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