



EVERYBODY BENEFITS: EMPLOYEE GUIDE

Get a good night's sleep

Are you struggling to get the recommended seven to nine hours a night or even not sleeping a wink? Then this guide is for you.

If you're lying awake at 2am replaying tomorrow's to-do list, worrying about work or counting sheep, you're not alone.

Around 9 in 10 people experience problems with their sleep, often caused by issues such as workplace anxiety, home-related stress, lifestyle factors or a sleep disorder.

Sleep problems are widely recognised as a cause of mental health concerns. Yet we rarely talk about this openly.

We may push through tiredness with caffeine, power through meetings on autopilot and tell ourselves we'll 'catch up at the weekend'.

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sleep disorders





Insomnia impacts physical and mental health

Poor sleep or insomnia can affect your work, relationships, mood and daily functioning.

But the 'normalisation' and acceptance of poor sleep have resulted in around **14 million suffering in silence with undiagnosed sleep disorders**. Persistent insomnia affects approximately 10% of the UK population and it is more common in women and more likely to occur in older age.

Furthermore, insomnia can increase the risk of developing a variety of other **chronic illnesses** including cardiovascular disease, obesity, neurological disorders, and type 2 diabetes.

Meanwhile, four in ten of us say that poor sleep **negatively affects our mental health at least once a week**. It can also increase the risk of developing further **psychological problems**, with those suffering from insomnia five times more likely to develop depression and 20 times more likely to develop a panic disorder.

Sleep isn't a luxury. It's a basic physical need and impacts how we feel, think and function.

This guide explores why so many of us struggle with sleep and suggests practical steps you can take to improve it.

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What is insomnia?

Insomnia isn't just the occasional restless sleep or a night tossing and turning. It's far more than feeling tired or wiped out. It can have a significant impact on quality of life and mental health and the symptoms can be different in different people:



Difficulty falling asleep



Waking frequently during the night



Waking very early and not being able to get back to sleep

For some people it can be short-term, triggered by an unexpected or stressful life event. For others, it can last months or years, often when linked to depression or a sleep condition.



Why so many struggle with sleep

Modern life doesn't have good sleep in mind! It is often one of the first things we forfeit when we need to fit more into a day.

Our daily habits and lifestyles don't lend themselves to switching off, from money worries to swapping books for e-readers, alarm clocks for phones and the pressure to be connected 24/7 - socially and at work.



Always in work mode

Work deadlines, financial worries and job insecurity can keep the mind and cortisol racing long after the working day ends. When these stress hormones are pumping round our bodies, our minds struggle to switch into 'rest, relax and repair' mode. It's common to feel wiped out but mentally 'wired'.



Screen time

Using phones, laptops and watching TV in bed suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin due to the blue light they emit. Plus, email alerts and news or social media pings keep the brain stimulated when it should be sleeping.



Irregular routines

Late nights, early starts, shift work or changing schedules all play havoc with our internal body clock. Spending most of the day inside, whether on a laptop, behind the wheel or on a production line, can also limit your exposure to daylight which doesn't help. When this circadian rhythm is disrupted, the brain struggles to know when to switch off.



4

Caffeine and alcohol

Caffeine can stay in the body for up to eight hours, so that late afternoon coffee may still be keeping you awake at bedtime.

Alcohol may help you feel relaxed and fall asleep more quickly but it is a sedative and disrupts your natural sleep cycle, meaning you miss out on the full restorative benefits of quality sleep. This is why you often wake up not feeling as refreshed as normal.

5

Worrying about sleep

Ironically, worrying about not sleeping can make it even harder to drift off. Once 'hitting the hay' becomes linked with frustration or anxiety, you can find yourself in a vicious, sleep-deprived circle.

6

Life stage and health

Hormonal changes (including menopause), chronic pain, anxiety, depression and some medications can all affect sleep quality and quantity.

Why good sleep matters to maintain physical health

During deep, restorative sleep, the immune system repairs and resets, helping us fight off infections more effectively.

When we sleep well at night, hormones regulate our appetite and rebalance our metabolism making it easier to maintain a healthy weight.

Blood pressure and heart rate also naturally lowers overnight, giving the heart and blood vessels time to recover from the day's demands. Inflammation reduces and muscles repair. Even our reaction times improve.

Over time, this nightly repair process protects our bodies and minds. Without it, the brain strain accumulates and keeps us wide awake when we should be in the land of nod.

People suffering from insomnia are 5 times more likely to develop depression



Sleep supports mental health

When we're sleep-deprived, everyday challenges feel bigger. Small frustrations can feel overwhelming. Over time, poor sleep can increase the risk of anxiety, stress, irritability, panic and low mood.

In short, sleep strengthens our ability to cope by giving us the time and space to process emotions and consolidate memories, allowing us to start the day with a refreshed, reset mind.

A well-rested mind can concentrate more easily, absorb information and recall it when needed. Decisions feel clearer. Problems feel more manageable. Emotional responses become more considered and less reactive.

With adequate sleep, we are less irritable and better able to regulate our feelings, even under pressure.

Perhaps most importantly, good sleep builds resilience. It strengthens our ability to cope with stress and setbacks. When we are well-rested, we are not just merely functioning - we are better equipped to thrive.

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Sleep like a log

10 ways to improve your sleep

There's no single magic fix but small, consistent changes can make a big difference to help you 'go out like a light'.

1

Time to wind down

Your brain needs a signal that the day is ending. This could be through:

- Turning off work emails at a set time
- Reading (a physical book)
- Gentle stretching, meditation or breathing exercises
- A warm bath or shower with lavender oils or a relaxing sleep pillow spray
- Listening to calm and quiet music

2

Go phone-free

Consider the following ways to remove the many temptations on your phone - from social media to shopping or scrolling through news and old photos.

- Charge your phone outside the bedroom
- Use a traditional alarm clock
- No screens 60 minutes before bed. If that feels unrealistic, start with 15-20 minutes and build from there

3

Keep sleep and wake times consistent

Go to bed and wake up at roughly the same time each day, including weekends where possible, to regulate your internal body clock.

4

Get moving

Regular physical activity and being outside in fresh air also supports deeper sleep.

5

Make your bedroom sleep-friendly

A comfortable bed, cool bedding and blackout curtains or an eye mask if needed.

6

Avoid stimulants

No caffeine, alcohol or nicotine from late afternoon.

7

Avoid eating big meals late at night

8

Try not to keep checking the time throughout the night



9

Manage racing thoughts

- Keep a notebook by your bed to 'brain dump' worries and write tomorrow's to-do list before bed
- Try slow breathing (inhale for 4, exhale for 6)
- Practice **progressive muscle relaxation** - a stress-reduction technique involving tensing and then relaxing specific muscle groups, usually starting from the toes and moving to the head
- If you're awake for more than 20-30 minutes, it can help to get up briefly and do something calming in low light before going back to bed

10

Explore a sleep app

You could try an online course like **Sleepio** which is a digital sleep improvement programme based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Sleep, meditation or mindfulness apps like **Pzziz** or **Headspace** may also help get you to sleep - and stay asleep for longer.

If none of the above helps, consider speaking to your GP. Keeping a sleep diary beforehand can be useful so you can discuss any patterns you've noticed. They may suggest Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) which can be particularly effective for long-term sleep difficulties or further investigations into potential sleeping disorders and conditions.





Good night...

Sleep is one of the most powerful and most underused tools for protecting both physical and emotional wellbeing.

Clearer thinking. More stable mood. Greater resilience. Improved physical and mental health.

If this guide prompts one small change tonight, that's a good place to start.

...sleep tight!



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