

Sleep matters...

Sleep is instrumental for our physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, as during sleep both our body and brains rest, recuperate and recharge for the following day. Sleep is one of the most important things when it comes to day-to-day happiness. A good bedtime routine boosts your relationships, keeps your heart healthy and strengthens your immune system keeping you in top form!

Steps we can take to improve sleep:

Monitor your sleep: Might seem strange at the beginning but keep a diary of your sleep patterns – when do you go to sleep, wake up, do you wake during the night, if so how many times. This information can give us an idea, when averaged, of how many hours sleep a night our body needs. With this data then we can create a good sleep routine.

Sleep is a behaviour: Sleep is like any behaviour – to get good at it you need to practice. Part of practice means routine. Get into a good routine regarding your sleep patterns. Where possible try to have a regular time to go to bed and get up, the more we do the more our body will learn when it is time to go to bed and switch off for the night and when it is time to get up.

Think about our evening routine: What do you do in the evening before bedtime? Do you think these activities make sleep more or less likely?

Caffeine: A lot of us love a nice cup of coffee/tea or even a fizzy drink. But these are stimulants, and when we're trying to sleep the last thing we need is for our bodies to be stimulated. Therefore good sleep means reducing caffeine intake in the evenings.

Alcohol: A lot of people will think that alcohol actually makes them sleepy. And yes, it often does. However, the type of sleep we get when we've consumed alcohol isn't the deep sleep we need for our bodies to feel rested but rather quite poor quality, shallow sleep. Therefore, better sleep might mean reducing alcohol consumption in the evenings.

Exercise: Getting some exercise in the evening can help with sleep. A workout can tire us out and therefore ready us for sleep. Additionally, some exercise can help us to use up all the excessive energy our body creates during the day when we deal with our daily stressors.

Associations: We can learn to make connections between things in our environment. Therefore one important connection we should aim to learn is to connect our bed with the behaviour of sleeping. What this means is that in order to create the optimal conditions for sleep we should only use our beds for sleep. If we go to bed and sit on our phone watching YouTube videos or playing computer games on your laptop then our brains learn that bed is where we engage in these activities and are actively stimulated – this isn't what we want if we are trying to relax and fall asleep.

Worries: If we have things playing on our minds they can stop us from being able to shut down in the evening and relax. Where possible it is helpful to deal with these worries before going to bed. This might simply mean making a note of the worry so that we can come back to it at a more suitable time (NOT bedtime). We are scheduling a more suitable time to deal with the issue that is bothering us.

If things do get too much for you, don't be afraid to ask for help. Whether talking to friends, family or an Inspire counsellor, getting things out in the open can help put things into perspective.

