



Norfolk and Waveney
**Children and
Young People's**
mental health service



Norfolk and Suffolk
NHS Foundation Trust

Self-Help Guide for Better Sleep

A guide for young people who may
be experiencing mental health
difficulties.



Welcome

We know that people are more likely to struggle with their sleep in their late teens and early twenties. This can be difficult in itself, but it can also make it harder to deal with other things that might be going on in life.

This guide is aimed to help you better understand your own sleep problem and choose which of the strategies included here might be most helpful for you.

If you have any questions, please contact your care provider who will be able to provide you with further information.

We have also made two videos that give more information on some of the ideas covered in the guide. You can watch these by following these links.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFyBIT4T7IA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRSiJFPSIho>



How to use this guide

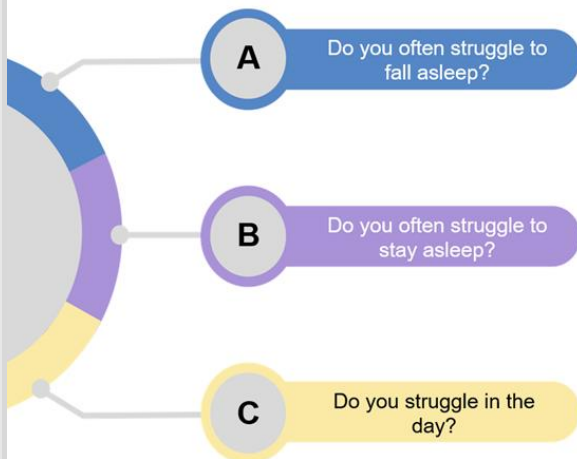
The first sections cover information to help you understand sleep and some 'quick wins' to help make sleep easier. These should be helpful for anyone struggling with their sleep.

You can use the guiding questions on the next pages to help find the strategies that might be *most* helpful for you.

OR

You can simply work through the booklet using the table of contents as all the strategies covered are likely to be helpful in some way.

Finding the right strategies for you



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Sleep Diary

We suggest using this diary to keep track of your sleep. You can use the blank spaces at the end to add extra information such as what you were doing that day, or how much caffeine you drank.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
What time did you feel sleepy?							
What time did you get into bed?							
Roughly what time did you get to sleep?							
Did you struggle to stay asleep? If yes, how many times did you wake up?							
Roughly how long did it take you to get back to sleep again?							
Did you have any nightmares?							
If 'yes' how distressing were they /10?							
What time did you wake up today?							
What time did you get out of bed?							
Impact on day (personalise)							
How refreshed did you feel after waking? /10							

Finding the right strategies for you



A

Do you often struggle to fall asleep?

A

The [Understanding sleep](#) and [Quick Wins](#) sections can help you understand what might be getting in the way of you getting to sleep and if there are any lifestyle changes you could make that might help.



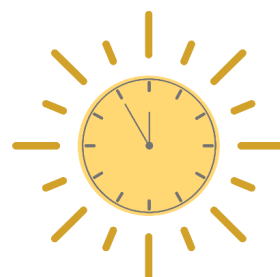
If you find you are spending a lot of time in bed not sleeping then check out our [BED=SLEEP](#) section.

BED = SLEEP

If you find you struggle to settle to sleep, check out the [Wind down routine](#) and [Helping your brain get ready for sleep](#) section.



If you find you are sleeping well but at the *wrong time*, then it can help to look at section **A** and **C**. Also make sure you check out the information on how our body clock works in the [‘Understanding Sleep’](#) section.



B

Do you often struggle to stay asleep?

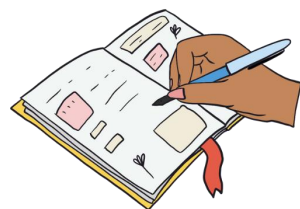
The [Understanding sleep: The harder we try](#) section explains how worrying about getting back to sleep can keep us awake for longer.



Check out the [Quick wins](#) section to make sure there isn't anything else like caffeine or light or noise at night that is keeping you up at night.



The [Helping your brain get ready for sleep](#) section covers grounding strategies and worry management techniques that can help you settle more easily.

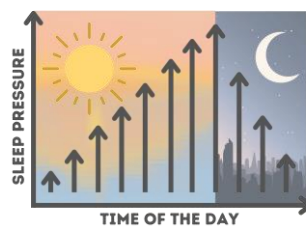


We have a section on [Nightmares](#) if these keep waking you up.



C Do you struggle in the day?

The [Understanding sleep](#) section will help you get a better understanding of the factors that might be affecting your sleep.



See the [Quick wins](#) section to check you are not managing your tiredness in ways that will disrupt your sleep further.



If you find you are staying in bed snoozing a long time, see the [BED=SLEEP](#) and [Wake up routine section](#).



If you are struggling to find time and energy for the things you enjoy or that are meaningful for you see the [Planning for the Day](#) section.





Click the [links](#) to jump to a page. Click the logo to return here...



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Why young people struggle with sleep

In your late teens and early adulthood, you might naturally get sleepier later but still have to get up at the same time for school and work.

A lot of people start going to bed early to catch up on sleep but this can mean a lot of hours in bed not sleeping if your body isn't ready to sleep yet.

It can then be easy to get distracted on social media or gaming or to get caught up worrying about stuff, including not getting enough sleep. All of this makes it *even* harder to get to sleep.



What happens when our sleep is disrupted?

When we aren't sleeping well we tend to see changes in our mood and behaviour.

We might feel:

- Irritable
- Down and low
- More anxious or worried than usual
- Like our emotions are more unpredictable



And as a result of this we might:

- Lack motivation and energy to do things
- Find activities we used to enjoy less fun
- Spend more time in bed



How does it affect you when you are tired?

Factors affecting our sleep

There are three big factors affecting our sleep that it helps to be aware of.

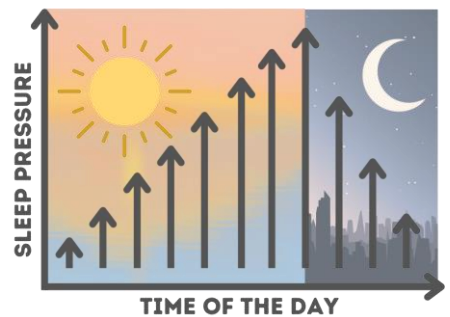
1. Our body clock

Our bodies run on a 24-hour cycle that lets us know when to be hungry, active, awake or asleep. This 'body clock' uses light signals such as sunrise and sunset to keep itself running on time. As light starts to fade, our brain releases a chemical (melatonin) that signals it will soon be time to sleep.



2. Our sleep drive or need

Our physical need for sleep builds up the longer we are awake and the more active we are. If we are napping or not doing much in the day we build up less need for sleep.



3. Connecting bed with sleep

It helps us sleep if our brain associates being in bed with going to sleep. We can strengthen this connection by reducing the time we spend awake in bed either trying to sleep or doing other activities such as watching TV or chatting with friends.



The harder we try...

Not getting to sleep can be stressful. It is easy to start worrying about how we'll feel tomorrow, why we can't sleep, how long we've been awake already...

The problem is that the more we worry about sleep, the more it gets in the way of getting to sleep.

- Can you relate to the example below?
- How would this look for you?

A

B

C

My thoughts:

Worry about not being able to sleep
How will I cope the next day?
Dreading nightmares

Things I do:

Try harder to sleep
Watch the clock
Go on my phone
Watch TV
Play computer games



My body feels:

Stressed
Tense
Restless
Fidgety

The harder we try...

This cartoon made us smile. Do you sometimes feel like this about getting to sleep?

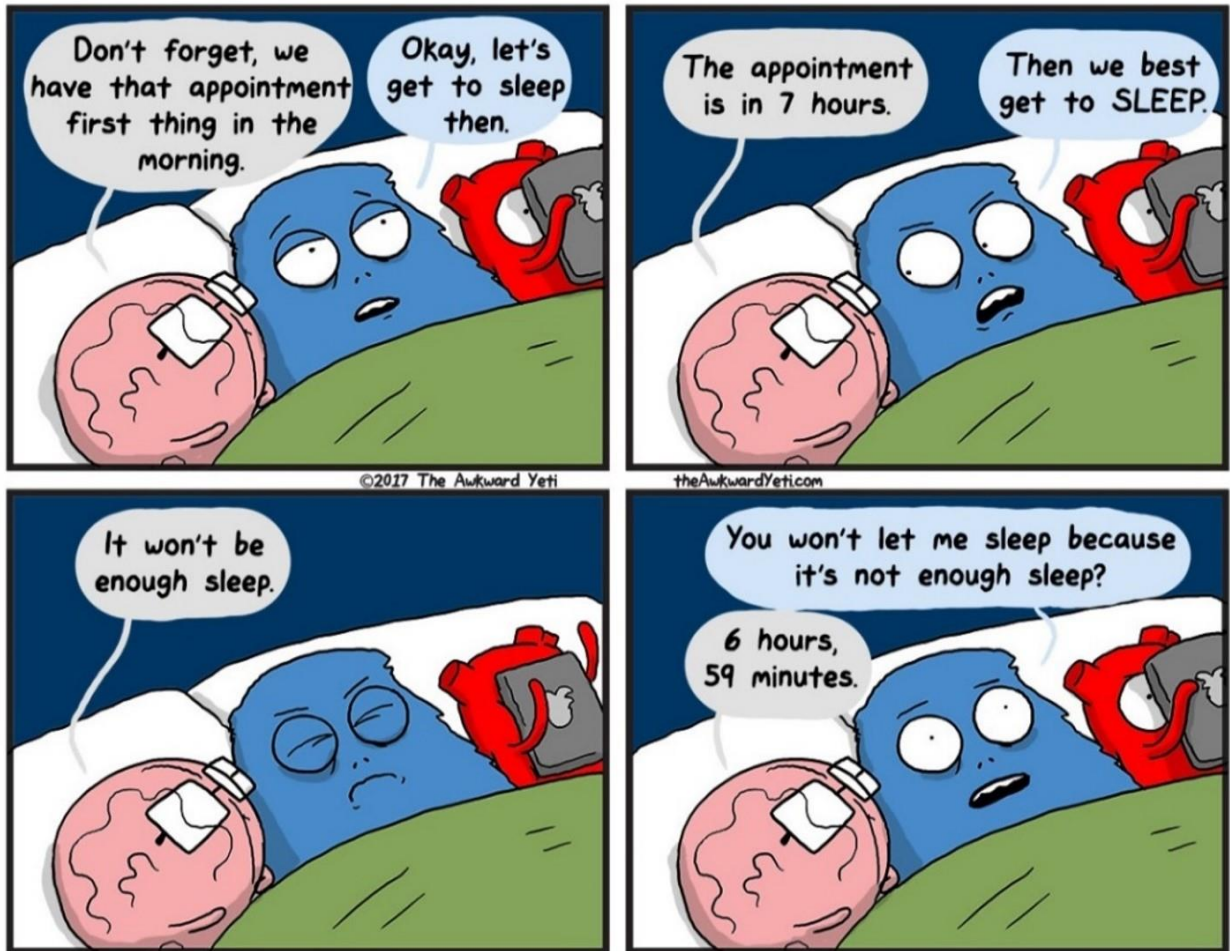


Image used with permission from The Awkward Yeti www.theawkwardyeti.com

When sleep works well, it is an automatic process. It works without us thinking about it.

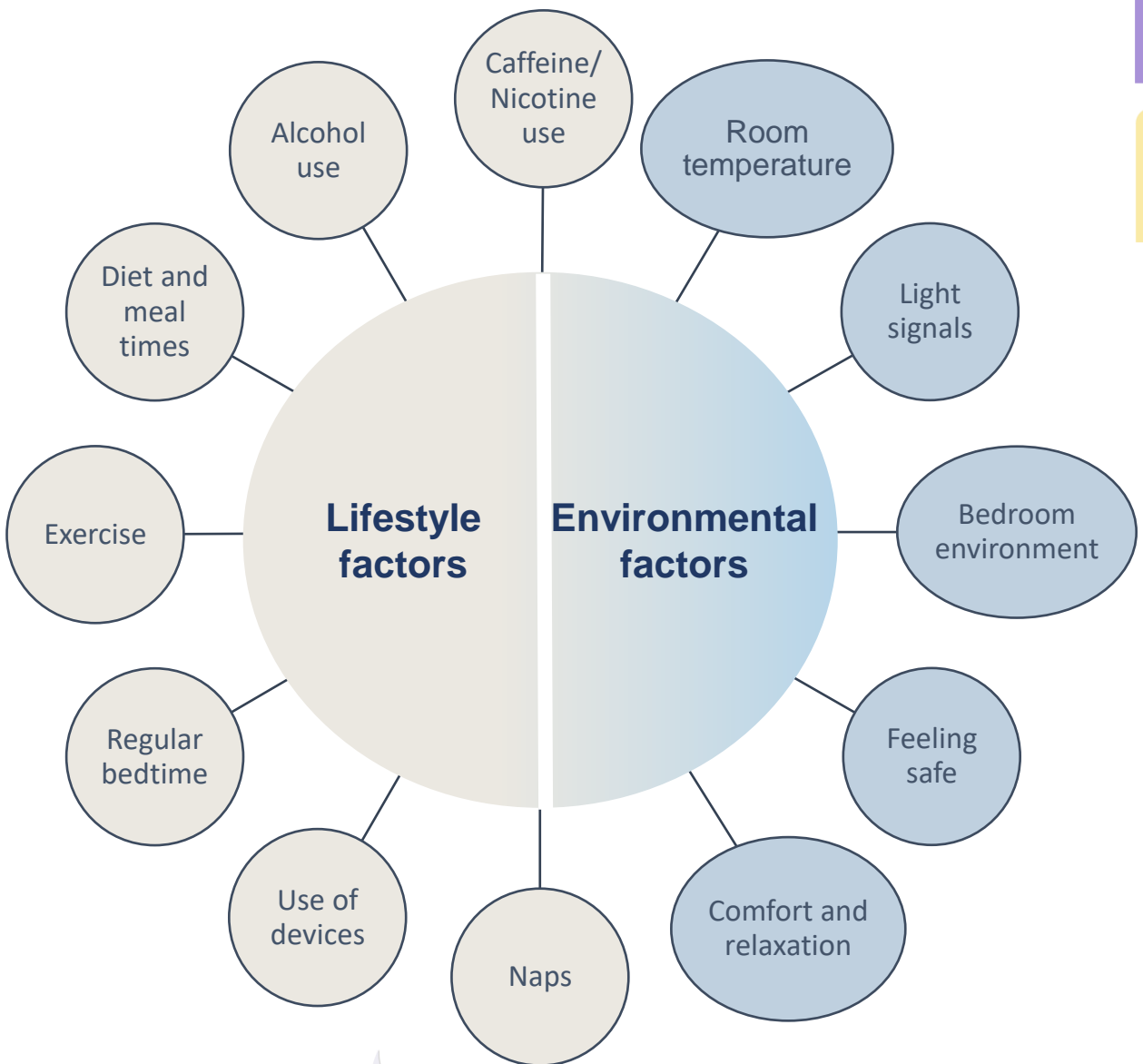
All of the tips in this guide are designed to help sleep become a more automatic process for you again.

Quick wins for good sleep

Listed below are some ideas for ‘quick wins’ – changes you could make that would either boost your sleep drive or send a clearer signal to your body clock to help you sleep more easily.

Which ones seem most relevant to you?

There is more detail on each of them over the next few pages.



A
B
C



Caffeine

Caffeine blocks signals of tiredness and stimulates our brain and nervous system.

Caffeine stays in our system for several hours so it can help to avoid caffeine in the afternoon and see if it helps with falling and staying asleep more easily.



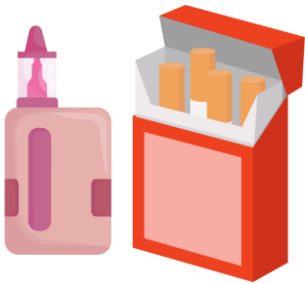
A

B

C

Nicotine

Acts as a stimulant and is best avoided or limited before bed. The breathing action associated with smoking can be quite soothing (long breath out) and can sometimes be part of what people find soothing in a night-time cigarette.



Alcohol

Can stop us getting to sleep by stopping us noticing we are sleepy. It can also dehydrate us and confuse our normal sleep cycles making it more likely we will wake later in the night. It can also make it harder to wake in the morning.



Exercise

Exercise and being active can help us feel sleepier at bedtime. Exercising in the morning tends to help us sleep earlier at night, whilst exercising in the evening might keep us awake longer, but it is good to see which works for you.



A

B

C



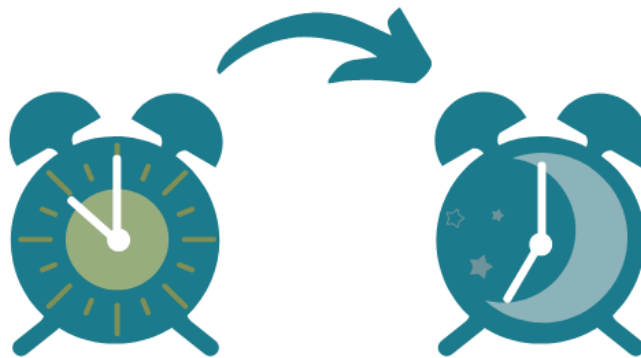
Diet

Eating meals at regular times through the day helps our body clock know when it is time to be sleepy.

Going to bed hungry can stop us getting sleepy though – our brain is designed to stay awake until we've eaten! Equally, going to bed too full can mean our body has to stay alert to digest it all which may mean sleep is less restful.

Regular Bedtime

Once you start falling asleep more easily, keeping to a regular bedtime and wake-up time for a few weeks can help your body clock get used to this new timing.



A

B

C

Naps

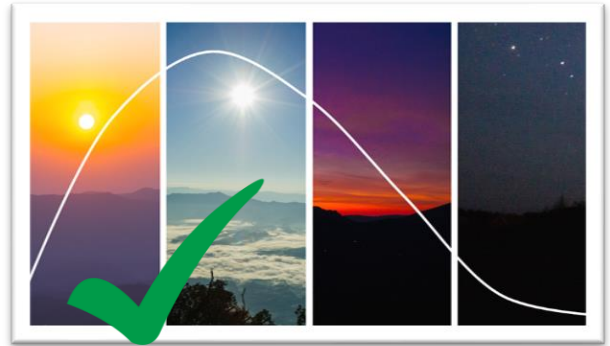
Naps can really eat into our sleep drive.

Whilst you are working on your sleep, it is best to avoid them if you can. If you absolutely have to nap, it can help to set a timer to keep them brief (under 15 minutes) or use a deep relaxation to rest deeply rather than sleep.

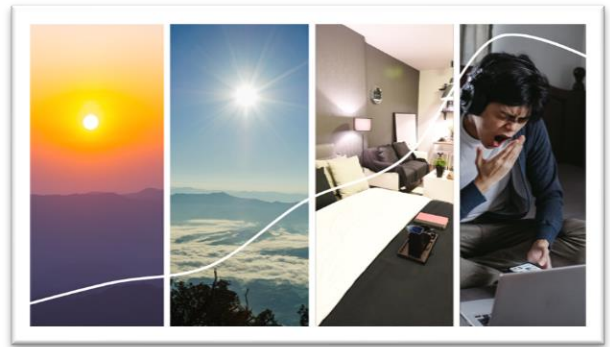


Light

This is the strongest way of resetting your body clock if you are struggling to fall asleep at the right time. Having plenty of daylight or bright light in the morning and then making sure light is dimmer in the few hours before bedtime (i.e., use lamps instead of overhead lights and avoid too much screen time) helps signal it is time to sleep.



vs



A

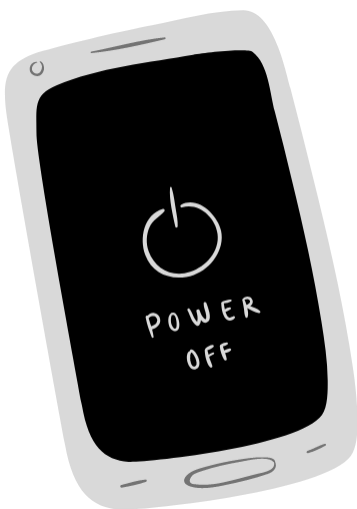
B

C

Devices

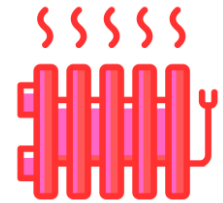
Are your devices helping you sleep or keeping you awake?

They can be a good source of relaxation scripts and calming music. But they can also confuse your body clock by sending light signals at night when it is time for sleep. Equally an engaging video or game can make you stay alert for longer and mean your body's cues for sleepiness get ignored.



Room Temperature

Our body used to know it was time to sleep when it got cooler, but central heating confuses these signals now. Think about keeping your bedroom a bit cooler and dropping the heating by a couple of degrees in the few hours before bedtime. Is your bedroom at a temperature that is comfortable for you and allows you to relax?



A

B

C

Bedroom environment

The more comfortable your bedroom environment is, the easier it will be to fall asleep. Do you have fresh air? Is it clear and uncluttered? Is your bed comfortable? Are you disrupted by sounds from outside or elsewhere in the house? Is it dark enough? Are there pets that wake you?



Comforting and relaxing

When we haven't been able to sleep for a long time, it can feel stressful just going to bed. Are there any changes you could make to your bed or bedroom that would make going to bed a more comforting and relaxing experience?

A

B

C



Feeling Safe

Do you feel safe where you sleep? Are there things you could have on hand to reassure and comfort you if you felt unsafe at all? If you are watching films, playing games, on social media or reading books before you go to sleep – are they likely to soothe your brain or leave it alert and on guard?

Teaching your brain that bed is a place for sleep

There are three main ways we can do this. They all help limit the amount of time you spend in bed not sleeping.

1. Only using your bed for sleep

When we spend time in bed during the day or do other things in bed such as eating, playing computer games or completing school/college work, our brain can get confused and find it hard to know that bed = sleep.

What changes could you make to help your brain learn that bed is a place for sleep?

BED =
SLEEP

2. Going to bed when you're ready for sleep

Feeling sleepy is slightly different to feeling tired. We can feel tired at any time of day, but we don't tend to feel ready to fall asleep. When we are sleepy, we might struggle to keep our eyes open, our eyes feel itchy, our head and limbs feel heavier, and we feel like we could fall asleep at any moment.

Are you able to tell the difference?
Do you go to bed when you're sleepy-tired at the moment?



Teaching your brain that bed is a place for sleep

3. What if I still can't get to sleep?

If you have waited until you are sleepy before getting into bed but still find yourself lying awake, try getting back out of bed and completing a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy again.

Use this space to write some activities that might help you relax.

A large, light gray rectangular box with a blue tab at the top, intended for writing activities. The box is empty and has a subtle drop shadow.

There are more ideas on how to relax later in this guide.

Planning for the day

There are lots of reasons why some people might struggle with being active in the day.

If you aren't doing very much then even just a bit more activity can help boost your sleep drive and make it easier to fall asleep in the evening.

You might want to set some goals for each day that are manageable and realistic for you.

C

Use the space below to think about what goals you might like to start with.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If you find yourself coming up with ideas of activities that you are currently unable to complete, write these down and keep them in a glass or a jar. You can then look back at these ideas in the future when you feel more up to it.



Wake-up Routine

It can be hard to get up in the mornings when you are tired, but it is a really powerful way to improve your sleep. Not only does it help boost your **sleep drive**, but the morning light helps re-set your **body clock** so that you sleep more easily later. It also helps teach our brains that **bed=sleep** when we don't spend ages awake in bed in the morning.

A

C

- ✓ Move your wake-up time earlier very gradually if you are waking very late in the day at the moment.
- ✓ Ask someone who understands to help you.
- ✓ Plan in a reward for getting up - maybe some time doing something you enjoy such as a favourite tv programme or game along with a breakfast treat.



Wake-up Routine

Take some time to plan out how your wake-up routine might look.

A

Time	Activity
e.g., 8.30AM 8.45AM	e.g., Wake up and make bed Breakfast – hot chocolate and waffles!

C



Wind-down routine

As you try to make sleep more automatic again, it can help to give your brain a good, clear signal that it will soon be time to go to sleep.

Think about the 2-3 hours before bed for you. You want to be starting to slow things down. Think about being in dim lighting and doing things you find restful or soothing.

Doing the same things each night as you physically start to get ready for bed can also help send a strong signal to your brain that it is time for sleep.



Wind-down routine

Take some time to plan how your wind-down routine might look.

A

Time	Activity
Approximate time	e.g., Finish up tasks for the day Main lights off – lamps on Set phone to vibrate Watch favourite light-hearted tv show Have warm drink and biscuit



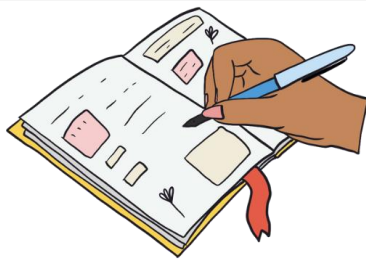
Managing worry

Worry can really get in the way of sleep. Below are two techniques that a lot of people find help them manage their worries.

Writing the worries out

If you are constantly thinking over different worries, it can really help to write them down, either before bed or if you wake in the night.

Have a notebook and pen ready at the side of your bed.



Setting yourself a worry time the next day

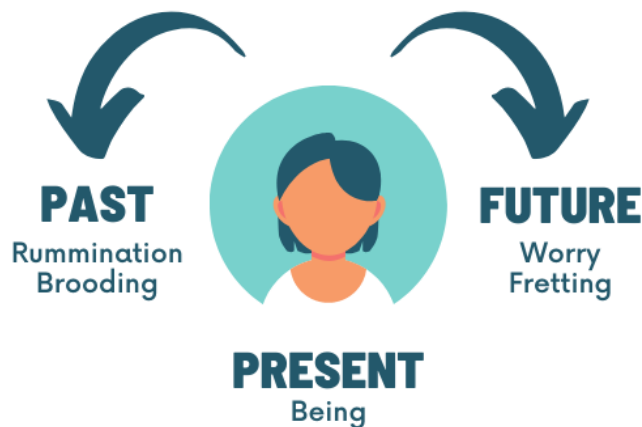
When our brain is tired it doesn't always do a good job at thinking clearly and keeping things in perspective. It can help to set yourself a time the next day when you can think the issue through more clearly.



Mindfulness

When we are feeling anxious and tired our brain can get caught up thinking over difficult past experiences and worrying about future ones.

Mindfulness techniques can help bring you back to the present moment. We have suggested some exercises on the next pages. They require a bit of practice so try not to be discouraged if you find them difficult at first.



Resources

Some people find it easier to listen to recordings of mindfulness exercises. There are several free audio resources online that can be found through Google or YouTube searches for 'guided mindfulness'.



Alternatively, the website below provides access to free audio resources you might find helpful.

<https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free-stuff/free-audio/>

Dropping the anchor



A

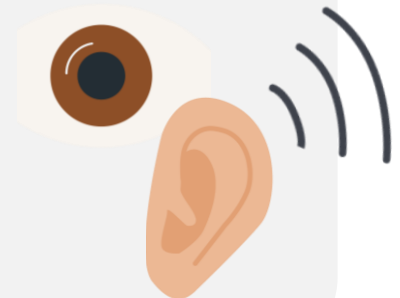
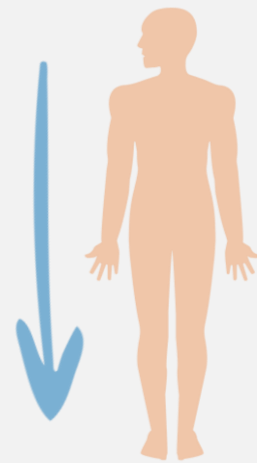
Plant your feet into the floor.

Push them down – notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.

Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.

Notice your entire body, and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.

Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you - where you are and what you're doing.



Notice five things

5

Pause for a moment.



Look around and notice five things that you can see.



Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.



Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet on the floor, your back against the chair).



Finally, do all of the above simultaneously!

A

Belly Breathing

A

Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly.

It can feel strange at first but try to gradually move your breath further down into your lungs so that the hand on your belly is rising as you inhale, and falling as you exhale.

Try slowly breathing in through your nose to a count of three, then breathe out through your mouth to a count of five. Whichever numbers work for you, try to keep your breath out longer than your breath in.

If you notice your thoughts start to wander, simply bring your attention back to your stomach rising and falling with your breath.

This breathing technique powerfully signals calm and safety to our brain. Repeat for at least five breaths.



Putting the day to rest

These techniques help you let go of your day when your brain doesn't want to switch off.

Photo album of your day

Think back to the start of your day and imagine your day as a series of pictures. Allow around 20 pictures for the whole day so that you don't dwell on individual details too much.

Try to notice the things you liked about the day as well as the things that could have been better.

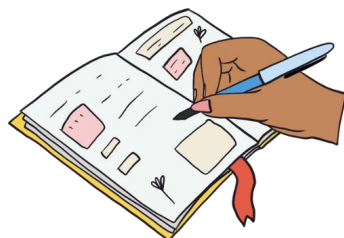
When you get to the end, picture closing the photo album. Accepting that this day is finishing. Which means a new one is starting soon.

Tying up loose ends

If thoughts keep popping up about things you want to remember for the next day, write them down in a notebook so you don't have to keep going over them in your mind.

Know that you can deal with them tomorrow.

Because your task now is to rest.



Help with Nightmares

When we wake up from a nightmare we can often feel very scared. Our brain and body react to the nightmare as if it is a real-life threat, causing us to go into **high alert** and making it hard for us to fall back to sleep.

The **grounding** strategies on the next page and **mindfulness** strategies covered earlier can help remind your brain that you are safe now and make it easier to fall back to sleep.

All the work in this self-help guide on making your sleep more automatic should also help establish a more regular routine with your sleep. This is often the best way to help with nightmares as we are less likely to wake and remember any bad dreams when we are sleeping well.



Grounding strategies

Grounding strategies can help bring our focus back to the present moment and can be helpful when we are feeling scared or overwhelmed. We've listed a few ideas that might be helpful.

Sight

Turn on the light and really notice your surroundings. Maybe have pictures of people or places you find comforting to hand...



B

Sound

Listen out for familiar sounds e.g., traffic outside, clocks ticking. Listen to soothing music, pre-recorded sounds, or an audio book.



Touch

Feel where your bed and bedding makes contact with your body. Have a soft cushion or blanket for comfort. Keep a stress ball or toy near your bed that you could squeeze or play with.



Taste

Keep a glass of water or some snacks by your bed. Focus on the sensation of drinking or eating.



Smell

Keep a relaxing essential oil or unlit fragranced candle by your bed. Spray fragrances used by loved ones onto a tissue or item of clothing and keep it by your bed.



Movement

Do some gentle stretches either from your bed or on the floor.



Putting it into practice



There is a lot of information in this guide. It may not all be relevant to you. It can help to think about the main ideas you want to take away and the first changes you want to try out.

A few tips...



- ✓ Share the ideas you want to try with someone you trust for support.
- ✓ Don't change everything at once, maybe start with a couple of 'quick wins'.
- ✓ Give each strategy you try some time to see if it works.
- ✓ Use the sleep diary to see if the changes you are making are helping or not.

Something I can try tonight



Something I can plan to do

Guide information



This guide introduces some ideas and techniques to help get your sleep back on track. If your sleep is very disrupted, you may find that you need more support than this. As part of The Better Sleep Programme, we have trained a range of staff in Norfolk and Waveney to offer more support around sleep. Speak to your care provider or contact Just One Norfolk [Health Advice & Support for Children - Just One Norfolk](#) for information about where you could get more help.



We hope you found this guide helpful. If you have any comments or feedback this QR takes you straight to a quick, anonymous feedback form.



Disclaimer: This guide was developed within Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust as part of The Better Sleep Programme. It is intended to be used as part of clinical practice and to be shared with service users. Please do not make alterations to the content without explicit consent from the authors (contact BetterSleepProgramme@nsft.nhs.uk, or the lead author, Dr Rebecca Rollinson rebecca.rollinson@nsft.nhs.uk).

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