

Sleep - What I Need to Know

Why is sleep important?

Whilst you are asleep your body carries out many important tasks, including:

- Fixing muscle that has been damaged.
- Dealing with waste products that build up in the body during the day.
- It can improve your mood, as reward chemicals are released during sleep.
- It helps with learning and the creation of memories.

Both the amount of sleep you get and the quality of the sleep are vital.

If you don't get enough sleep this can cause stress hormone levels to rise. This leads to an increase in blood glucose, insulin levels, blood pressure, and damage in the body (inflammation). If this isn't addressed it can cause weight gain, and increase the risk of long-term health problems.

Not getting enough good quality sleep can also increase hunger and lead to more snacking. The foods people opt for when they are tired are usually ultra-processed junk foods.

Stress can affect our sleep, and a lack of good quality sleep can increase stress levels. This can become a vicious cycle if nothing is done to try and stop it.



How can you improve sleep?

Some tips to improve your sleep include:

- Sleeping in complete darkness.
- Sleeping in loose fitting clothes.
- Having a regular sleeping pattern (aim for seven to nine hours per night).
- Keeping your bedroom cool.
- Staying hydrated, but avoiding drinking excessive amounts in the evening.
- Avoiding using laptops, tablets and phones, or watching television, just before bed.
- Avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening. For some people it is best to avoid caffeine entirely after midday.
- Avoiding long daytime naps.
- Exercising regularly (though taking part in exercise too late in the evening may affect your ability to fall asleep).
- Trying to get out in the daylight for at least 10-20 minutes in the morning, as this can help your body's internal clock to work better.
- Trying to relax before bed, for example by having a bath or shower.

If you do wake up during the night, try not to clock-watch. If you're still awake after a little while, it can help to get up and take part in a quiet activity, such as reading, until you feel tired again, then returning to bed.

If you are still struggling to sleep after trying some of these things talk to your healthcare team about it.

Further info:

www.thesleepcharity.org.uk

www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-tips-to-sleep-better