

# Sleep disorders and mental health

We all need to sleep well to help our bodies to function at their best. Lack of sleep can make us feel physically unwell as well as feeling stressed and can contribute to becoming mentally unwell. Regular poor sleep puts you at risk of serious medical conditions, including obesity, heart disease, diabetes, road accident deaths and can shorten your life expectancy. It has been estimated that we now sleep around 90 minutes less each night than we did in the 1920s due to our 'busy' lives. If we add in those who suffer with sleep problems, we can see how many people function in a permanently sleep-deprived state.

Most of us need around eight hours of good-quality sleep a night – some people need more and some less. If you wake up feeling tired and spend the day longing to have a nap, it's likely that you're not getting enough sleep.

When people with anxiety or depression were surveyed to calculate their sleeping habits, it turned out that most of them slept for less than six hours a night. About three in 10 Britons suffer from insomnia.

Mental health and sleep are very closely related. Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety Disorders including OCD, Psychotic Disorders including Schizophrenia - can all have an effect on sleep.

## Mental health problems can impact sleep in the following ways

If you are depressed you may find yourself sleeping more in order to avoid day to day commitments as you feel you can't cope with them. This can lead to oversleeping – either sleeping late in the morning or a lot during the day. This can then prevent you from sleeping well later that night.

Depression often causes insomnia at night; with frequent waking throughout the night, and then often early morning awakening and finding you cannot return back to sleep.

Stress and anxiety can result in racing thoughts going through your mind, also making it difficult for you to sleep.

Psychosis may make it difficult for you to sleep. You may worry that something is going to happen to you or your family if you go to sleep. You may hear voices or see things that you find frightening. Psychosis can also lead to racing or disturbing thoughts, which can make it hard to relax and prevent you from falling asleep.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can often cause nightmares and night terrors, forcing you to relive the episode that caused you trauma. This can result in disturbed sleep.

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Mania can also cause racing thoughts which can make it hard to fall asleep and result in insomnia. Mania results in feeling less need for sleep at that time.

## Medications can impact on sleep

Psychiatric medications can cause sleep problems. Certain medications, such as antidepressants, can cause side effects that include insomnia, disturbed sleep or oversleeping. You may also have sleep problems immediately after you have stopped taking psychiatric drugs (MIND).

## NHS Choices ten tips to beat insomnia

1. Keep regular bedtime/awakening hours
  2. Create a restful sleeping environment
  3. Make sure that your bed is comfortable
  4. Exercise regularly
  5. Less caffeine
  6. Don't over-indulge (alcohol)
  7. Don't smoke
  8. Try to relax before going to bed
  9. Write away your worries
  10. Don't worry in bed
- (via The Sleep Council)

## Advice to help you sleep better

If you try the above tips and you still can't sleep, the advice would be to go and see your doctor (either your GP or psychiatrist if you have one).

You can talk over any problems that may be interfering with your sleep. Your doctor

can check that your sleeplessness is not due to a physical illness, a prescribed medicine, or emotional/mental health problem. There is evidence that cognitive behavioural therapy can be helpful if you haven't been sleeping well for some time. (Royal College of Psychiatrists).

## Further help and information

### The Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation have got some podcasts on their website. Listening to these may help you to go to sleep.

Find the podcasts online at [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) alongside other information on sleep problems.

### MIND

The charity MIND has information on their website on sleep problems. Visit: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) or call the Mind Infoline: **0300 123 3393** or text **86463**.

### The Royal College of Psychiatrists

The Royal College of Psychiatrists have a comprehensive fact sheet on; 'Sleep problems in children and young people: information for parents carers and anyone who works with young people'.

They also have a fact sheet for adults; 'Sleeping Well'. Both can be accessed from: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk).

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices share information on their website to help combat insomnia. Visit: [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia).