



Dr Emma Pooley

Treating you differently

Insomnia Advice

Sleep disturbance can cause a lot of distress and lead to poor daytime functioning so it is important to help yourself as much as you can to improve matters. There are many things that you can try before resorting to drugs. The following are brief suggestions;

1. It is important to get up the same time every day. Do set an alarm. This does not apply to teenagers who have a longer sleep cycle than adults.
2. If you need extra sleep either go to bed earlier or take a short afternoon nap.
3. It is important to make your bedroom about sleep and sex so avoid having a television in your room and working in your bedroom.
4. Ensure that your room is properly dark to get off to sleep. Blackout curtains may be best. It is important to have comfortable bedding and a room that is on the cooler side.
5. Have a screen curfew at least 1 hour before bed time. This includes phones, ipads and laptops. Ideally during the last 2 hours of the day use the night screen setting on your devices, which reduces the amount of blue light emitted by the screen and enables your body's melatonin to kick in and help you fall asleep.
6. If you have been lying in bed for 20 minutes and not fallen asleep, try getting up and doing something quietly in a different room. This could include reading a book, doing a jigsaw, meditating or listening to quiet, relaxing music. When you feel sleepy go back to bed. If you have not fallen asleep within 20 minutes then repeat the cycle. A meditation CD or Youtube video screen face down on a phone whilst in bed may work for you.
7. When you get up in the morning it is important to open your curtains. Daylight will help stimulate the body to wake up. You could eat breakfast in the sunniest room in your house. A short walk or exercising outside when it is first light also helps this. All this boosts serotonin levels in the brain which makes us feel happier.
8. Exercise during the day can help us sleep. Exercise in the evening can inhibit some people sleeping though so discover what works for you.

9. For some people caffeine affects their sleep. If you are having sleep issues I would recommend reducing your caffeine intake to less than 4 cups a day, the last one being about 6 hours before you go to bed. Some people find going caffeine free works best for them.
10. Alcohol is best avoided with sleep issues. It helps some get off to sleep but for many it then interferes with sleep later in the night and leads to disturbed broken sleep later on.
11. Regular breaks during the day roughly every 90 minutes help us to relax and not get too stressed. Stress interferes adversely with the hormone cortisol and leads to sleep problems so it is important to address the stress in your life.
12. It is important to unwind the hour or so before bedtime. A bath, some yoga or a quiet read are all good ways. A bedtime routine is really helpful as it signals to the body that sleep is to be expected.
13. You need a comfortable bed with a pillow that allows the spine to stay straight when you lie on your side.
14. Cotton bedlinen rather than manmade allows the body to breathe. Change your linen weekly.
15. The menopause is very disruptive when it comes to sleep. If you have tried all these measures and you are still struggling then medication maybe appropriate and a discussion with a GP would be helpful.
16. It is currently thought that the body has a 90 minute sleep cycle. You can use this to ensure that you sleep in blocks of 90 minutes. There is more about this in the book 'Sleep; The Myth of 8 Hours, the Power of Naps...and the New Plan to Recharge Your Body and Mind' by Nick Littlehales.