

Lesson 3

Your Sleep Sanctuary

Introduction

As mentioned in lesson 2, getting the right amount of sleep is vital to your daytime functioning. It affects how alert you feel and how much you engage in life. There are many ways of maximising the quantity of your sleep.

Good sleep hygiene, particularly, the physical environment and healthy habits are conducive to preparing your body and mind to sleep.

- Examples of good sleep hygiene include firm sleep schedules from Monday to Sunday.
- A relaxing bedtime routine.
- Physical features in your bedroom, e.g. light, sound, temperature, comfort.
- Electrical devices turned off.
- No caffeine or nicotine hours before bedtime.

The science

Studies show that good bedtime habits and routines, otherwise known as sleep hygiene can help you maximise the hours you sleep. They are effective even for those whose sleep is disturbed by insomnia, jet lag, or shift work.

This is basic stuff and not rocket science! Yet many underplay the advice and therefore miss a trick.

Research findings advise to avoid caffeine, found in coffee, tea, chocolate, and cola for four hours before bedtime. Refrain from smoking tobacco near bedtime. Keep your bedroom temperature between 60 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Why this helps

Your mind and body require signals to indicate that you will soon be retiring to bed to sleep. Going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, including weekends and holidays makes this an easier job for your internal body clock, or Circadian Rhythm, as it's alternatively know.

To unwind, slow down in what you do. Take a bath. Rest your digestive system by not eating or drinking a few hours before bed. Listen to soothing music. Your brain will soon recognise the signals that it will soon be time to sleep.

Exercise

For this exercise, you will need 10 minutes.

Assess your bedroom for good sleep, as if looking at it from a sleep expert's perspective. Be curious about why you have the things you have in your room.

- Be ruthless and minimise clutter.
- Darken the room, choosing a blackout blind or heavy curtains
- Place an eye mask on your pillow ready for bedtime.
- Try using earplugs to block out any noise, putting them on your pillow.
- Feel the temperature of the room and adjust accordingly. Cool rooms and a cool body temperature facilitate a good night's sleep.
- Is the room well ventilated?
- Does the room have plug-in perfume smells? Remove.
- Try out the mattress and pillows. How comfortable are they? (It's recommended that a change in mattress is needed every eight to 10 years).
- Assess your duvet or bed sheets? Are they the appropriate tog ratings/temperatures for your room?

What have you learnt?

So is your bedroom a Sleep Sanctuary?

Good sleep hygiene involves a range of habits and routines that help you get a good night's sleep.

Whilst the advice is easy, it can be hard to put in place, as there are conflicting influences from people, food/drink, and media/entertainment.

What next?

If you're struggling to get to sleep due to worry, we've got exercises you can practice to help you switch off and sleep soundly.