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# Workbook 8

## Overcoming sleep and other problems

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Overcoming Depression  
*A Five Areas Approach*

# Section 1 Introduction

In this workbook you will learn:

- what are sleep and insomnia;
- common causes of sleep problems and actions you can take to help overcome problems of poor sleep;
- hints and tips for overcoming common physical problems that occur as part of depression or anxiety.

## **Understanding sleep problems**

Sleeping problems are common and affect large numbers of people. At times, sleep can be disrupted for a variety of different reasons.

### **What is sleep?**

In spite of the fact that we spend around a third of our lives asleep, sleep is something that we often take for granted until we are unable to do it. The amount of sleep each individual needs varies throughout their life. Babies and young children need a lot more sleep than older adults. Many people find that by the time they reach their 60s or 70s, the amount of sleep they need has dropped by up to several hours a day. The average time we sleep is often said to be about eight hours but this is only true for some people. There is a wide normal healthy sleep range. Some people sleep only four to six hours a day whereas others can sleep for as many as 10 or 12 hours a day. Both extremes are quite normal.

### **What is insomnia?**

Insomnia, or inability to sleep, is something that many people notice from time to time. Insomnia may start after an isolated incident or an upsetting life event, or it can be related to a feature of a person's lifestyle. Think about the following factors that can worsen sleep and see whether they are present in your own life.

## **Factors affecting sleep**

### **Preparing for sleep**

The time leading up to sleep can be very important. Try to build in a 'wind-down' time when you are less active. Physical over-activity (e.g. exercising), or eating too much just before bed may keep you awake. Sometimes people read in bed, or watch television while lying in bed. This sometimes can help them wind down, but for many people it can make them become more alert – therefore adding to sleep problems.

**Q. Am I engaging in activities, which wake me up when I should be winding down?**

Yes  No

**If yes:** Try to avoid watching television or working in bed. Try to keep your bed as a place for sleep or sex. Try to avoid lying on your bed reading, working or worrying. This will only cause your brain to become overactive and prevent you sleeping. You need to decide for yourself whether listening to a radio or music is conducive to sleep or not in your particular case.

If you are taking part in a keep fit programme, this is a good thing, however it is best to take exercise no later than the early evening. Try to avoid doing exercise in the half-hour before going to sleep as it may backfire and wake you up.

**Physical problems**

Sometimes symptoms such as pain, itching or other physical symptoms can cause sleeplessness. Tackling these physical symptoms may be an effective treatment of your insomnia.

**Q. Are physical symptoms keeping me awake?**

Yes  No

**If yes:** If physical symptoms such as itching or pain are keeping you awake, please discuss this with your doctor or health care practitioner. Sometimes symptoms of depression or anxiety can worsen symptoms such as pain, in which case treating the low or anxious mood will help to reduce the pain.

**Physical environment**

Think about the conditions where you sleep. Is your bed comfortable? If possible you should try to change your mattress at least every eight to ten years. What about the temperature of the room where you sleep? If the room is either very cold or very hot this might make sleeping difficult.

Is the room very noisy? Sometimes it is easier to get off to sleep if the room or house where you live is quiet. Although noise can keep people awake, it is often short-term noises that occur intermittently that are more likely to cause awakening than more long-term droning noises. Is there too much light to sleep? If bright lights such as streetlights come through your curtains, this can sometimes prevent sleep.

**Q. Do I try and sleep in a poor sleep environment**

Yes  No

**If yes:** The following are specific things that you can do to overcome a poor sleep environment:

- **Poor mattress:** If your mattress is old, change it if you can. If not, try turning it over, or rotate it. Sometimes adding additional supports such as a board underneath it can help.
- **Too hot/cold:** If it is too hot, alter the ventilation. Open a window or use a fan. If it is too cold, think about insulation (many grants are available), secondary or double-glazing etc., or add an extra blanket.
- **Problems with noise:** Reduce external noise. Think about tackling the causes of noise directly. Can you speak to noisy neighbours and ask them to turn down their music? Have you thought about fitting double-glazing or internal plastic sheeting over windows to reduce noise? Sometimes purchasing a white noise generator, which produces a monotonous low-level noise, can mask intrusive external sounds.
- **Problems with excessive light:** Consider changing your curtains; adding a thicker lining (or blackout lining) can help. If cost is a problem, a black plastic bin bag can also be an effective blackout blind if stapled or stuck to the curtain rail.

### **Psychological problems**

A range of different psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and worry or stress at work or in relationships can upset sleep. For example, a person who suffers from depression may find that it takes them up to several hours to get off to sleep. They may then experience a disrupted sleep pattern with multiple awakenings, and then finally wake up several hours earlier than normal feeling unrested or on edge. Treatment of the depression will lead to an improvement in the quality of sleep.

Similarly, problems of anxiety and agitation can worsen sleep. In sleep, there is a reduction in arousal and tension levels leading the body and brain to begin to relax and drop off to sleep. In contrast, in worry, the brain becomes overly alert. The person is preoccupied by worrying thoughts and ends up mulling over things again and again in their mind. This is the exact opposite of what is needed to get off to sleep and can cause problems of insomnia.

**Q. Do I notice anxiety and worry when I try to sleep?**

Yes

No

Worry is often associated with a triggering of the body's **fight or flight adrenaline response**. This can cause the person to feel fidgety or restless and they may notice symptoms such as an increased heart rate, breathing rate, a churning stomach or tension throughout the body.

**Q. Do I notice symptoms of depression when I try to sleep?**

Yes

No

Depression is a common cause of sleeplessness. Treatment of depression can often be helpful in aiding sleep when this is the result of depression.

### **What about caffeine?**

Caffeine is a chemical that is found in coffee, tea, cola drinks, hot chocolate and some herbal drinks. Caffeine causes increased alertness, an increased heart rate and if taken at high levels for several weeks can begin to cause physical and psychological dependence and symptoms of addiction. It may surprise you to know that drinking five strong cups of coffee a day on a regular basis has been shown to be physically addictive and also to reduce sleep quality. There is a danger that a vicious circle can occur where tiredness causes the person to drink more coffee to keep alert, and then the coffee itself prevents the person obtaining the sleep that would have reduced the original tiredness.

**Q. Am I drinking too much caffeine?**

Yes

No

Try to avoid chemical stimulants. If you are regularly drinking more than five cups of strong coffee a day, you should try to either reduce your total caffeine intake in a step-by-step manner (e.g. by reducing by one cup of coffee a day), or switch to decaffeinated coffees or teas. Other caffeine-containing drinks should also be reduced if you are drinking them to excess. This will help your sleep, and also may reduce your general tension levels.

Avoid having a night-time cup of coffee or a last cigarette before sleep. Both caffeine and nicotine will keep you awake. Some people have found that taking a warm milky drink such as a bran-based drink can help you get off to sleep.

### **What about alcohol?**

Sometimes people drink alcohol to reduce feelings of tension or depression or to help them get off to sleep. Studies have shown that if you drink more than the recommended levels of alcohol (22 units a week for women and 28 units for men, where one unit is approximately half a pint of beer, one short, or one glass of wine), symptoms such as anxiety, depression and sleeplessness can occur. In addition, if you drink too much of any liquid late at night you may find yourself having to make frequent visits to the toilet thus further keeping you awake.

**Q. Am I drinking too much alcohol?**Yes  No 

Getting up in the night to use the toilet can be avoided by reducing the amount of alcohol or other fluids you drink before going to bed. If you take a diuretic (a water tablet), you should try to take these earlier in the day to avoid having to get up during the night. Discuss this with your doctor.

If your drinking of alcohol is above the **healthy drink range**, please try to cut down the amount you drink in a slow step-by-step manner. If you do not do this, it is unlikely that you will quickly get over your feelings of depression, anxiety or sleeplessness. Discuss how best to do this with your health care practitioner.

**What about your sleep pattern?**

Scientists have studied the brain to find out what happens during sleep. Like plants and animals we are affected by our surroundings and respond to rhythmic changes such as day and night. It is the cycle of day and night, light and dark that triggers our sleep pattern. Our **biological clock** is set by the natural daylight and night-time darkness that occurs each day. Sometimes when people don't sleep they disrupt their entire social calendar in an attempt to overcome this. Instead of going to sleep at a reasonable time, they may go to bed either **very much earlier** than normal or **very much later**.

**Napping** is another habit that can end up backfiring by upsetting the natural sleep-wake cycle. This can cause great difficulties by altering the stability of the sleep pattern.

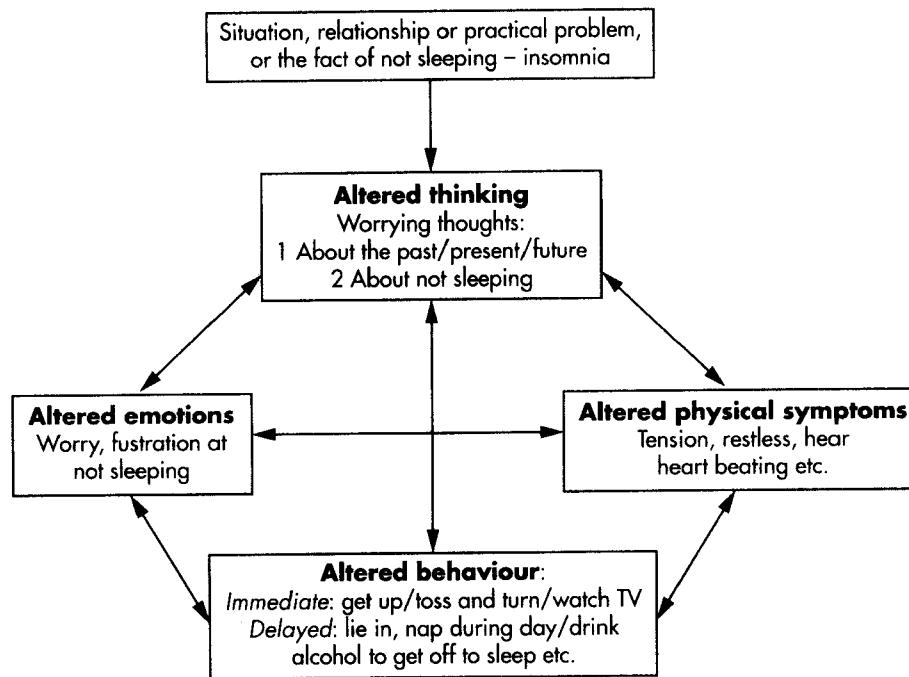
**Q. Do I have a disrupted sleep pattern (time to bed/getting up)?**Yes  No 

**If yes:** Set yourself regular sleep times. Get up at a set time even if you have slept poorly. Try to teach your body what time to fall asleep and what time to get up. Try to go to sleep some time between 10 p.m. and midnight. Also make sure that you get up at a **sensible** time (preferably some time between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m.). Adjust these times appropriately to fit your own circumstances, however, it is advisable not to go to sleep either too early or to lie in bed too late in the morning. If you find you cannot get off to sleep, one helpful approach is to get up, do something else until you feel 'sleepy tired', and then return to bed.

**Q. Do I nap during the day?**Yes  No 

**If yes:** Teach your body clock a regular sleep/wake cycle. Avoid napping – taking naps in the day reduces the amount of sleep you need at night and can disrupt the need for night-time sleep. Daytime naps can cause sleep problems. It is important to try to avoid them.

Anxiety and insomnia are often linked together. Stress about life and about not sleeping contributes to insomnia. Extreme and catastrophic fears about not being able to sleep at all and therefore not being able to function with any efficiency can itself cause increased stress thus preventing the person getting off to sleep. The altered behaviour that is the result of this worry may actually end up worsening the problem. The key to the problem is **worry**. The impact of worry in causing and maintaining insomnia is summarised as the **vicious circle of insomnia**.



**Figure 8.1 The vicious circle of insomnia.**

### ***The treatment of sleeplessness***

Psychological treatment approaches to help people with sleeplessness depend on the **modification of worry**. Worry can be both a **cause and an effect** of poor sleep. Challenging extreme and catastrophic fears about the consequences of not sleeping is important. You can find out how to do this within workbooks 4 and 5. In addition, making changes to what you do when you don't sleep is important. One effective approach is to get up out of bed if you are not sleeping after 30 minutes, go downstairs and do something else until you are 'sleepy tired' again. Then return to bed.

### ***Tackling worry about not sleeping***

Worry about the consequences of not sleeping is very common. Common fears are that the person's performance at home or at work will plummet. Sometimes the person fears that they will become irritable and unable to cope. Sometimes they worry that either their brain or their body will be harmed by a lack of sleep.

This vicious circle of insomnia can be broken at a number of different places by:

- optimising conditions for sleep using the techniques described on the recent pages – this includes altering unhelpful behaviours that are maintaining the problem;
- reducing worry by learning a relaxation technique;
- challenging the extreme and unhelpful catastrophic thoughts about the consequences of a lack of sleep.

### ***Important information about sleep***

Sleep is a necessary part of life, however studies have shown that most people do not need very much sleep at all to be physically and mentally healthy. In sleep research laboratories, it has been found that many people who suffer from insomnia actually sleep far more than they think. Sometimes people who are actually sleeping and are in a light level of sleep can actually **be dreaming that they are awake**. This information may help allay fears that you are not sleeping at all. It is also important to know that sleep deprivation does **not** have catastrophic impacts on the brain or body. It is possible to function effectively with very little sleep each night.

**Q. Do I have extreme or catastrophic fears about the consequences of not sleeping?**Yes  No 

Extreme and catastrophic fears can themselves **cause** increased wakefulness thus preventing you getting off to sleep. Being aware that these thoughts are extreme, inaccurate and unhelpful is important. Although you might feel tired and irritable, this does not necessarily affect your ability to perform tasks around the house or at work.

**Key advice: Overcoming sleep difficulties**

- 1 Try to get into a **routine**. Go to bed and get up at a regular time. Avoid drinking too much coffee, tea, hot chocolate and soft drinks, which contain caffeine – around five cups or glasses a day of caffeine-containing drinks should be the maximum. Switch to decaffeinated drinks or water for drinks beyond this.
- 2 **Nicotine** in cigarettes can also cause sleeplessness. Avoid smoking just before bed.
- 3 **Avoid napping** during the day. It upsets your body clock.
- 4 Watch your **alcohol** intake. Alcohol causes sleep to be shallow and unrefreshing and can cause you to waken to use the toilet.
- 5 Consider the **surroundings** to your sleep (noise, light levels, temperature, e.g. too hot or cold, and also the comfort of your bed).
- 6 If you don't get off to sleep, **get up, leave your bedroom** until you feel 'sleepy tired', then go to bed again.

## Section 2 Hints and tips for overcoming common physical changes in depression and anxiety

The following is a short practical summary of some immediate changes that you can bring about that may help the physical symptoms you are experiencing.

Physical symptoms of depression and anxiety	Hints and tips
Difficulties getting off to sleep	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Try to get into a <b>routine</b>. Go to bed and get up at a regular time.</li><li>2 <b>Avoid napping</b> during the day: it upsets your body clock.</li><li>3 Avoid drinking too much coffee, tea, hot chocolate and or soft drinks which contain caffeine – around five cups or glasses a day is the maximum. Switch to decaffeinated drinks if you drink more than this.</li><li>4 Watch your <b>alcohol</b> intake. Alcohol causes sleep to be shallow and unrefreshing.</li></ol>
Wakening earlier than usual	<p>This is common in depression and improves as the depression gets better.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Try to rest in bed.</li><li>2 If you feel agitated get up. Consider medication to reduce agitation if this is a problem. Discuss this with your doctor.</li><li>3 Try to get up before 9.00 a.m.</li><li>4 If you lie in (or nap during the day), this is likely to upset your body clock and add to your problems.</li></ol>
A disrupted sleep pattern	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Sleep problems are common in depression and anxiety. They will not cause any immediate harm to your body or your mind.</li><li>2 If you find yourself waking up repeatedly during the night, get up, do something else (e.g. read, watch television but avoid scary films that may wake you up still further) until you feel 'sleepy tired', then go to bed again. <b>It is important not to sleep or nap during the next day</b> even if you feel tired.</li></ol>
A decreased appetite	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Eating a balanced range of foods is important to keep both your physical and mental strength up.</li><li>2 Try to eat foods that contain energy such as protein, fats and carbohydrate, and also fruit and vegetables.</li></ol>
An increased appetite	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Try to eat a balanced and sensible diet.</li><li>2 Plan your shopping to avoid impulse buys particularly of carbohydrates such as biscuits or chocolate.</li><li>3 In particular, try to avoid any increases in alcohol intake. It may add to your depression or anxiety.</li><li>4 Try to eat meals while sitting at a meal table. Avoid snacking or bringing extra food to the table. If you want to eat more, force yourself to get up so that it is a conscious decision to eat it.</li></ol>
Increased weight	<p>Reduced activity levels and increased appetite may cause weight gain. Think about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Introducing some mild exercise into your day (this may also boost your mood).</li></ol>



Physical symptoms of depression and anxiety	Hints and tips
Increased weight ( <i>continued</i> )	2 Eating a balanced diet: vegetables and fruit will also prevent constipation.
Decreased weight	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Eating a balanced range of foods is important to keep both your physical and mental strength up.</li> <li>2 Try to keep eating a balanced range of foods that contain energy such as protein, fats and carbohydrate, and also fruit and vegetables.</li> </ol>
Reduced energy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Low energy is a common problem in depression.</li> <li>2 A vicious circle can arise. By reducing your activity, your muscles are used less. This causes them to weaken and feel painful and tired when they are used.</li> <li>3 An effective way of overcoming this is to plan a <b>graded increase in your activity</b> in a step-by-step way.</li> <li>4 This often leads to a <b>boost</b> in how you feel mentally as well as physically.</li> <li>5 Remember, don't overdo exercise. Plan a <b>slow</b> increase in what you do. Just five minutes of exercise (e.g. walking up and downstairs three times a day to begin with) is the sort of level to aim at if you have not been doing any recent exercise. Slowly increase it over the next few days and weeks.</li> <li>6 <b>If you have a physical illness</b>, please discuss this with your doctor and agree a plan for this graded increase in activity.</li> <li>7 A common symptom in depression is to feel worse first thing in the morning. If you notice this, plan to do activities (such as going out) later on in the day.</li> <li>8 Finally, don't throw yourself into this too quickly. Do it <b>one step at a time</b>.</li> </ol>
A reduced sex drive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 A reduced sex drive is common in depression and anxiety. If you have a partner, try to discuss this with them.</li> <li>2 Your sex drive will improve (as with other symptoms) towards its previous levels as you recover from low or anxious mood.</li> <li>3 In men, antidepressants can sometimes cause problems with having erections or ejaculating. In women antidepressants can sometimes reduce or prevent the experience of orgasm. If this is a difficulty for you and you are taking antidepressants, discuss this with your doctor.</li> <li>4 If you find it difficult talking about this with a partner please do try to discuss it with your health care practitioner if this is a problem.</li> </ol>
Symptoms of constipation	<p>Constipation commonly occurs in depression.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Simple changes can help: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● eat vegetables, bran and fibre;</li> <li>● exercise helps constipation;</li> <li>● drink a reasonable amount of fluids.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2 Constipation can be a side effect of some antidepressants.</li> </ol>
Symptoms of pain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Pain such as chest pain, stomach pain and headaches may be worsened by depression or anxiety. If this is the case, treating the depression or anxiety is the best treatment.</li> </ol>

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**Physical symptoms of depression and anxiety**

**Hints and tips**

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Symptoms of pain ( <i>continued</i> )	2	If the pain is linked to the depression or anxiety, you may find that painkillers such as aspirin and paracetamol do not seem to be very effective.
	3	If this is the case, it is important to avoid building up the dose of painkillers you are taking. This may cause new physical symptoms, and for some, painkillers may even cause more symptoms of pain and possibly addiction.
	4	In this case, treatment with antidepressants is often more effective. Please discuss this with your doctor.
Symptoms of physical agitation	1	Focusing your attention on them can sometimes worsen physical symptoms of agitation. This mental tension then adds to the unpleasant physical tension feelings.
	2	If the agitation feelings are very distressing, consider using medication to reduce it. Many effective short-term medications (which are not addictive) are available. In addition, antidepressant medication will often improve symptoms of agitation caused by depression. Discuss this with your doctor.

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## Workbook summary

In this workbook you have learned about:

- what are sleep and insomnia;
- common causes of sleep problems and actions you can take to help overcome problems of poor sleep;
- hints and tips for overcoming common physical problems that occur as part of depression and anxiety.

## Putting into practice what you have learned

Try to put into practice what you have learned during the next week. If you have difficulties with this workbook, don't worry. Just do what you can. If you have found any aspects of this workbook unhelpful, upsetting or confusing, please can you discuss this with your doctor or health care practitioner.



