

Factsheet 13: Understanding and managing poor sleep



EXERCISE: Worry time



If you find yourself worrying in the evening, choose a time during the evening in which you will give yourself 5-10 minutes to write about your worries. Be strict with the time limit.

During the time, note down what you are worrying about or what makes you sad or anxious. Separate your worries to what is and what isn't in your control.

Inadequate or disrupted sleep is a common challenge, especially for those who have experienced trauma and stress. Memories about the past and worries about the future can interfere with sleep, leading to problems falling asleep, frequent waking, and disturbing dreams. Improving sleep quality is crucial for overall wellbeing.

The impact of poor sleep

Poor sleep can affect our mood, thinking and daily actions. The quiet moments before sleep may bring forward thoughts about the past, or current worries you have, causing tension and restlessness. Disturbing dreams, flashbacks, or restlessness may disrupt your sleep, leaving you feeling fatigued and irritable the next day.



Once the time limit is done, stop (even if not finished). Put away any writing paper and acknowledge that you will deal with the issues within your control in the morning. Practice acceptance and letting go of the worries beyond your control.

Strategies for improving sleep

1 Establish a relaxing bedtime routine:

Create a calming pre-sleep routine to signal to your body that it is time to wind down. This could include activities like reading, prayer, deep breathing, or taking a warm bath.



2 Reduce daytime stress:

Practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, gentle stretching, prayer or taking a daily walk. These activities can help to manage stress during the day, reducing its impact on sleep at nighttime.



3 Create a comfortable area for sleeping:

Ensure your sleeping space promotes rest by being dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature. Invest in a comfortable mattress and pillows and make sure curtains block out light.



4 Check for unhelpful habits:

Avoid daytime napping, scrolling on mobile phones or watching TV in bed. Limit alcohol, caffeine, and heavy meals before sleep—no caffeine after 2pm and no meals within 3 hours of bedtime.



5 Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day:

Go to bed and wake up at the same time daily. Consistency helps regulate your body's internal clock.



6 Other habits:

- Get out of bed if you can't sleep. Do something relaxing until you feel sleepy, then try again
- Accept a bad night's sleep. Remind yourself you can try again tomorrow
- Don't stress about not sleeping. Let go of the worry
- Avoid checking the clock. Set an alarm if needed to ease your mind
- Exercise daily. Aim for 30 minutes, but avoid it 3–4 hours before bed
- Do something calming. Try breathing exercises, mindfulness, prayer, or a sleep story app



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