

Foundations of Health – Sleep Optimisation

In a world where stress levels are rising, exposure to natural sunlight outdoors is diminishing and technology is leading to constant demands for everybody's attention, it's no surprise that so many of us struggle to get enough sleep.

The amount of sleep that qualifies as “enough” differs depending on who you ask. But it usually falls between about 7–9 hours per night for adults (and even more for children and teens). However, everyone is a bit different in terms of their ideal amount of sleep. Some of the best sleep aids are simple measures, including adjusting the type of light you're exposed to daily, managing stressors in your life, making changes to your diet, and establishing a consistent night time routine.

Getting enough sleep is a vital, dynamic part of a healthy lifestyle. The body needs adequate rest each night for a variety of reasons, including:

- Fighting infection and strengthening the immune system
- New growth and repairing of tissues and organs
- Maintaining good digestion
- Supporting detoxification
- Healthy hormonal metabolism
- Maintaining cognitive health

Sleep Hygiene Measures

Create a Healthy Routine

Develop a Relaxation routine. One hour prior to bedtime allow your mind to relax and unwind. A hot bath will support sleep onset.

Avoid heavy meals within 3 hours of bedtime. Enjoy healthier meals which will balance blood sugars in the evening containing good quality proteins and fats.

Avoid excessive liquids before bedtime to avoid sleep disturbance in the night.

Try Journaling. If you're having racing thoughts or worried about the next day, write it all down on paper. Counting your blessings is a great way to end the day on a positive note.

If you can't settle, try a relaxation technique or meditation to aid relaxation. We have suggested various helpful resources below.

Set a regular bedtime. Try to rise and go to bed at the same times each day, including weekends. Retire between 10 and 11pm for the healthiest melatonin production.

Avoid stimulants

No caffeine after 3pm (it has a 12-hour lasting effect). You may need to avoid it altogether if you are sensitive. This includes coffee, cola, tea (including green / matcha tea), and dark chocolate.

Avoid alcohol before bed. Although it can act as a sedative initially, it can cause night waking and disrupt sleep in the longer term. It can also increase snoring and sleep apnoea.

Exercise in the morning or earlier in the day if possible. Exercising at night can lead to increased alertness for some people (due to increase in the stress hormone cortisol).

Create a bedroom which is conducive to sleep

Stay cool at bedtime (<18°C). The cold will help decrease your core body temperature which can help to initiate sleepiness.

Keep your room dark. Use curtains or black-out blinds, especially in summertime when the days are longer.

Banish laptops, phones, TV and work from the bedroom. Make your bed a comfortable sanctuary away from work to relax and sleep.

Improve your Circadian Rhythms and Melatonin production

Take a few minutes to expose yourself to the sun each morning. Exposure to morning sun helps to maintain the natural circadian rhythms that govern sleep and waking.

Reduce Blue light before bed. Turn off electronic devices (which give off blue light), at least 2 hours before bed if possible. The blue wavelengths enter the eyes and prevent the production of melatonin (the natural sleep hormone). Try reading instead of watching TV to wind down in the evening. If you really need to use a screen, then look at options to reduce blue light exposure below.

If you want to improve your overall sleep/wake cycle, changing the colour and brightness of indoor lighting can have a profound effect on sleep quality and melatonin production. See more information in our resources below.

Avoid napping as it interferes with the natural Circadian Rhythm. If extremely tired, limit nap time to 30 minutes or less.

Helpful Resources

Blue Light Blockers:

For those who need to continue with screen use before bed, the use of amber coloured glasses or Apps to change the screen brightness and colour can be used. Options include:

F.Lux: <https://justgetflux.com>

<https://www.amazon.com/amber-glasses-sleep/s?k=amber+glasses+sleep>

Try to view the sunset and dim the house lights after dark, always being mindful of safety.

Indoor Light Management:

If you want to improve your overall sleep/wake cycle, changing the colour and brightness of indoor lighting can have a profound effect on sleep quality and melatonin production. Opt for flicker-free, low colour temperature light bulbs as this will reduce the impact on your circadian rhythm and relax your nervous system. This is a good article to help you decide on the most appropriate light bulbs for your sleep hygiene

<https://www.blockbluelight.co.uk/blogs/news/led-fluorescent-lighting-dangers>

Specialist lamps have also been found to improve mood in those who tend to suffer with seasonal low mood (SAD syndrome). There is a good article on this issue here:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/sad-lamp>

Relaxation Exercises / Apps for Sleep

Insight Timer: Free App with thousands of guided Sleep Meditations, sleep stories and soundtracks to aid sleep: <https://insighttimer.com/individuals>

The Sleep Foundation also produced a review of available apps to support sleep for adults and children: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/best-sleep-apps>

Uncommon Knowledge Sleep Hypnosis sessions:

<https://www.hypnosisdownloads.com/sleep-problems>

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86HUcX8ZtAk&list=PLFxT7tUfXXZFGOm1wez6CRCAzIVfj5UTq&index=7&ab_channel=relaxforawhile

Supplements for Sleep

There are many Natural ways to help support sleep safely. Herbal therapy can be very effective and we offer tailored advice in our 1-1 Nutritional Therapist and Doctor-led sessions. However, the following suggestions can be tried by all:

Essential oils:

Pillow sprays and diffusers have been found in studies to transmit signals to the brain inducing a feeling of calm and sleepiness. In particular, lavender, bergamot, Cedarwood, Clary Sage and Chamomile have all been found to be effective as aromatherapy agents.

Products which we enjoy include:

https://naturaldispensary.co.uk/products/Sleep_Ease_Pure_Blend_10ml-10002484-0.html

https://naturaldispensary.co.uk/products/Sleep_Better_Pillow_Mist_100ml-10003322-0.html

Teas:

Provided they don't make you visit the bathroom in the night, a warm relaxing herbal tea before bed has been used as a natural sleep-aid for centuries. Many herbs have also been studied for their sleep-promoting properties. You can read more about this here:

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/teas-that-help-you-sleep> Some of our favourite bedtime teas are:

Dragonfly Tea Night Sky Calm: <https://dragonflytea.com/products/night-sky-calm>

Clipper Organic Sleep Easy Infusion: <https://www.clipper-teas.com/product/organic-sleep-easy-infusion/>

Pukka Herbs Night Time Tea: <https://www.pukkaherbs.com/uk/en/products/night-time-tea>

Teapigs Snooze Sleepy Tea: <https://www.teapigs.co.uk/products/snooze>

Magnesium:

Magnesium is one of the UK's most common deficiencies and lack of this important mineral is associated with inability to relax, poor sleep and cramps. Various forms can be used to support a healthy sleep routine including bath salts, skin lotions and sprays as well as more traditional drinks and pills.

Magnesium supplements are a foundation of many of our supplement plans. Here are a few products we like to recommend:

Epsom Salts: https://naturaldispensary.co.uk/products/Epsom_Salts_1_5kg-14735-0.html

Add 1 cup (275g) per hot bath and soak for 15 minutes or more

BetterYou Body Oil Spray: https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/magnesium-oil-5ml?_pos=6&_sid=8ba59b3df&_ss=r

Biocare Magnesium Taurate: https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/magnesium-aurate-60-capsules?_pos=2&_sid=8ba59b3df&_ss=r

Nutri Advanced Mega Mag Calmeze:

https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/megamag®-calmeze-magnesium-powder-orange-raspberry-or-chamomile-flavour?_pos=8&_sid=8ba59b3df&_ss=r

Sleep Apnoea and Snoring

The British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association offer a snoring self-diagnosis tool designed to help you identify the likely cause of any snoring and help find a solution to the problem. This can be accessed here:

<https://britishsnoring.co.uk/itests/>

In cases where sleep is disturbed by airway collapse (snoring or stopping breathing), further investigation needs to be undertaken to find out what the underlying causes are, in order for it to be treated effectively.

Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA):

Sleep apnoea is when airflow to the lungs becomes blocked during sleep, and is considered to be clinically significant if the episodes last for more than 10 seconds and more than 5 times an hour. Those who suffer from this condition will awake (sometimes repeatedly with a loud snort), many times at night, and usually feel very tired during the day. People with sleep apnoea may complain of excessive daytime sleepiness often with irritability or restlessness. But it is normally the bed partner, family or friends who notice the symptoms first.

In more severe cases, sleep apnoea can lead to increased cortisol, weight gain, high blood pressure and increased risk of chronic health problems and effective relief from this problem is really important in those with poor health. You can read about this condition and the common symptoms here:

https://britishsnoring.co.uk/snoring_&_sleep_apnoea/what_is_sleep_apnoea.php

The STOPBang Questionnaire is a simple screening tool which you can use to determine whether you are at high risk of having the condition:

https://britishsnoring.co.uk/stop_bang_questionnaire.php

If you or your doctor suspect that Sleep Apnoea may be an issue which is affecting you, [Sleepstest.co.uk](https://www.sleepstest.co.uk) offer further advice and access to simple home testing kit which can be used at home (without waiting for referral to a sleep clinic on the NHS):

<https://www.sleepstest.co.uk>

Better Breathing for Sleep Disturbance and Snorers

Snoring and sleep disturbance can often be improved through improved management of the airways at night to reduce mouth breathing and encourage better nasal airflow. Ways which some people find can improve nasal breathing and reduce snoring include:

Tackling weight gain which is often associated with increased swelling in the tissues of the throat and neck.

Reducing exposure to environmental allergens for those affected. This may include feather pillows, house dust and pollens. For some a good Quality HEPA filter may be worth the investment. The article below discusses this topic and has some recommendations for filters: <https://www.flexappliances.uk/the-know/how-do-air-purifiers-stop-snoring>

Reducing exposure to foods causing excessive sinus blockage or mucous. Most commonly dairy and alcohol.

Avoidance of alcohol in the evenings – which can lead to excessive sedation and airway blockade.

Use of essential oils in a diffuser such as eucalyptus and peppermint can help to clear nasal blockage and reduce snoring. You can read about effective remedies here: <https://www.healthline.com/health/essential-oil-for-snoring#snoring>

Sleep on your side. Sleeping on the back is usually associated with increased risk of airway collapse. Devices to encourage side-sleeping can be very effective for some people. There are some great tips on side sleeping here: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleeping-positions/side-sleeping>

Mandibular Advancement Devices

Mandibular Advancement Devices (MAD) are aimed at tongue based snorers to hold the lower jaw and tongue forward making more space to breathe and prevent snoring. If you have false or uneven teeth, gum disease or temporo-mandibular joint dysfunction, please consult with your dentist before

trying this approach. You can see the available devices here:

https://britishsnoring.co.uk/shop/mandibular_advancement_devices_MADs.php

Buteyko Breathing

The Buteyko breathing method trains you to switch from mouth breathing to nasal breathing, helps to reduce nasal blockage, reduces breathing volume and can be used to significantly reduce snoring and sleep apnoea in mild to moderate cases. You can read about the benefits of the Buteyko technique for sleep disturbed by airway problems here:

<https://buteykoclinic.com/sleepapnea/>

Our qualified Buteyko coach Laura offers online Buteyko technique lessons to patients as an initial three-session training programme (plus top-up sessions as required). Please do contact the clinic to book an appointment.

The Buteyko Method - Breathwork sessions with Laura Johnson, Nutritional Therapist.

- Reduce Stress & Anxiety
- Improve Sleep Disorders
- Manage Asthma & other breathing conditions

Developed in 1952 by Ukrainian Medical Doctor Konstantin Buteyko, this breathing technique can help improve peripheral oxygenation and reduce stress hormone levels by

stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. Buteyko is practised as a series of breathing exercises specifically designed to reduce over-breathing (clinically known as 'chronic hyperventilation').

A commonly held belief is that taking deep, full, large breaths is beneficial for health, however this over-breathing can constrict blood vessels and airways, worsening the symptoms of numerous conditions. The Buteyko method helps to correct disordered breathing patterns, enhance feelings of calm and is proven to help with sleep disorders (including snoring and sleep apnoea), asthma, hayfever, anxiety, panic & depression and can also help to lower blood pressure.

Our qualified Buteyko coach Laura offers an initial three-session training programme (plus top-up sessions as required). Sessions are recommended weekly to fortnightly (subject to availability) at a cost of £195 per initial package. Please do contact the clinic to book an appointment or enquire further.

Continuous Positive Airways Pressure (CPAP)

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy is the most common treatment for patients with moderate or severe sleep apnoea. Using a mask which fits over the nose, the machine provides a constant flow of pressurized air designed to support the airway and prevent the soft tissues of the mouth and throat from blocking regular respiration while sleeping.

Patients often report better quality sleep, decreased snoring, and increased energy and ability to concentrate during the day. The therapy can also help to effectively manage the side-effects of sleep apnoea including high blood pressure and diabetes. Controlling sleep apnoea is a crucial part of lowering your risk for cardiovascular problems, obesity, Alzheimer's disease, and stroke.

Referral to an NHS specialist clinic or private clinics are both available for further advice on this treatment.

My Notes: