

*“Some great advice, thank you. But………. it didn’t work!”*

Sleep deprivation leads to stress and stress leads to sleep deprivation. A bit of a vicious circle.

We are often given great advice from family and friends on how to improve our sleep but putting it into practice can be tricky. So, what is stopping us?

Acting on the whole block of advice all in one go and focusing on the destination, can feel too much. Breaking it down into baby steps and enjoying the journey, typically yields the best results.

If you’re having trouble sleeping during these less structured days, you’re not alone. #cantsleep has been trending on Twitter for the past several weeks. As we enter the next week of lockdown, lack of quality sleep can begin to affect our physical and mental health.

**So how can you sleep more soundly?**

1**. Nail down your sleep routine.**

Sleep is regulated by our internal body clock, called the circadian rhythm. Your circadian rhythm is developed in response to your normal pattern of daily life. People typically have around seven hours of sleep per night. Ideally, we should look to match our routine to the natural rhythm of light and dark. Going to bed around10.30pm and getting up at around 6am sets you up perfectly. Developing your own routine in which you go to bed and wake up at the same time every day helps develop your bodies circadian rhythm.

2. **Limit your exposure**

**Limit your exposure to the news and social media.** In the current time, it is easy to lose hours staring at screens, watching as things unfold and change. Instead, decide how much time each day you’re going to allow yourself for updates. For example, 15 minutes of news in the morning and 15 in the afternoon. Also ensure you’re limiting your time scrolling on your phone through social media. Make sure you only look at trusted resources, select a couple and limit yourself to using only these.

3. **No blue light**

Blue light screens on our TV, phones and laptops will typically wake you up.Also, engaging with on screen activity can be over stimulating for your brain and is the exact opposite of what you want to achieve as you relax and calm everything down ready for sleep. Try to avoid looking at screens at least 90 minutes before you turn in. If you do need to look at a screen, consider using blue light filter glasses!

4. **Are you eating right?**

Sleep, diet and mental health are closely connected – Serotonin the neurochemical that regulates our mood and our sleep patterns is produced inside our gut. Damage to your gut microbiome (indiginous bacterial population in the gut) from stress, sugar, alcohol, or a low-fibre diet, can ultimately affect serotonin production and increase your risk of poor sleep and mood disorders like anxiety. Your diet is a really good place to start when considering a spring clean to your routine. Fibre rich foods you could try adding to your dish are chia seeds, almonds and oats. Also dark chocolate with cocoa of 70% or more and of course, in moderation.

5. **Eat your meals at the same time every day**

Like children, your gut bugs thrive on structure and a regular schedule. They like to know when their meals are coming. No caffeine after lunch, and drink in moderation. What’s the problem with caffeine, I hear you say. Caffeine is a stimulant — and that can be bad news for anxiety. Caffeine's jittery effects on your body are similar to those of a frightening event. That's because caffeine stimulates our "fight or flight" response, with studies showing that this can make anxiety worse. No late night snacking and try **not** to eat after 7pm as this forces your gut to do some heavy digestive work which won’t improve the quality of your sleep.

5. **Keep your cool**

Prepare for sleep at least 2hours before bedtime. Having a hot shower or warm bath and then allowing the body to cool down afterwards tells our brains that is time to sleep. Hence sleeping in a cool room is best for a goods night’s rest.

6. **Exercise during the day**

Lots of research shows that some exercise during the day improves our quality of sleep.Some people will do some yoga and stretching before bed. This keeps us away from our screens, is a great way to relax and is great for our deep breathing which helps us relax.During the day its important to take regular breaks and move around. There are some great free exercise and dance videos online or we can take ourselves off for a walk and get some fresh air and sunshine. Strictly Come Dancing have some routines for us to learn, watch Oti Mabuse’s online dance class for adults, these sessions are streamed on her social media accounts and play at 7.30pm.

7. **Celebrate the best**

As you get into bed, write down 3 positive things that happened to you today. Research shows this is a great way to improve mood.

**How to get started**

Small regular habits build up and become part of our natural routine as opposed to undertaking a large step intervention that happens irregularly and we end up abandoning the whole idea after a few weeks. May as well not bother in the first place!!

It takes around 15 days to make a habit of something, so don’t give up too quickly and celebrate each step forward.

**Tips for making those changes stick**

Start Easy. Ease and simplicity mean we can complete a task without too much effort.

B J Fogg, [www.bjfogg.com](http://www.bjfogg.com), is a behaviour scientist, his latest book is Tiny Habits. He shows how behaviour change can be achieved if we take baby steps. He gives a great example of this as he starts to develop the habit of flossing his teeth. He starts with one tooth and then gradually builds on this. If he had set out to floss all his teeth, from the very start, he probably would have lost the motivation and desire fairly quickly. However, breaking it into baby steps, he saw and felt the benefits of doing a few teeth and wanted to build on this until he had the great achievement of wanting to floss his teeth, twice a day.

Build your new activity off an existing positive behaviour. Brushing your teeth is already an activity you naturally do, so attach your new activity of flossing teeth to follow on from this. They support each other.

Ready to reduce your caffeine intake? Reducing your caffeine intake could start next breakfast time, you have a healthy breakfast and a coffee so switch the caffeine drink for something healthier to complement your breakfast. What will you choose? See how this makes you feel!

**Your Action Plan**

Write down 3 baby steps you will take to improve your sleep

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |

**Final Actions!**

Please share with me how you get on. This can be via a photo, picture, story or sharing your action plan along with how you got on. Any tips you have, please share with me, they would be great to have and I will share them out.

I look forward to hearing from you and sharing your success. Email: Thea.bloyce@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Next time we will look at mindfulness and relaxation. Sleep well and stay safe

*Thea*