

Sleep



Sleep difficulties are common, particularly during periods of stress, hormonal change, or emotional strain. While the strategies in this resource may be helpful, ongoing sleep problems are often closely linked to thoughts, emotions, and life experiences that benefit from individual support.

If sleep is affecting your wellbeing and you'd like tailored therapeutic support, I offer a gentle, integrative approach that considers both emotional and physiological factors. Please feel free to contact me to discuss how we might work together.

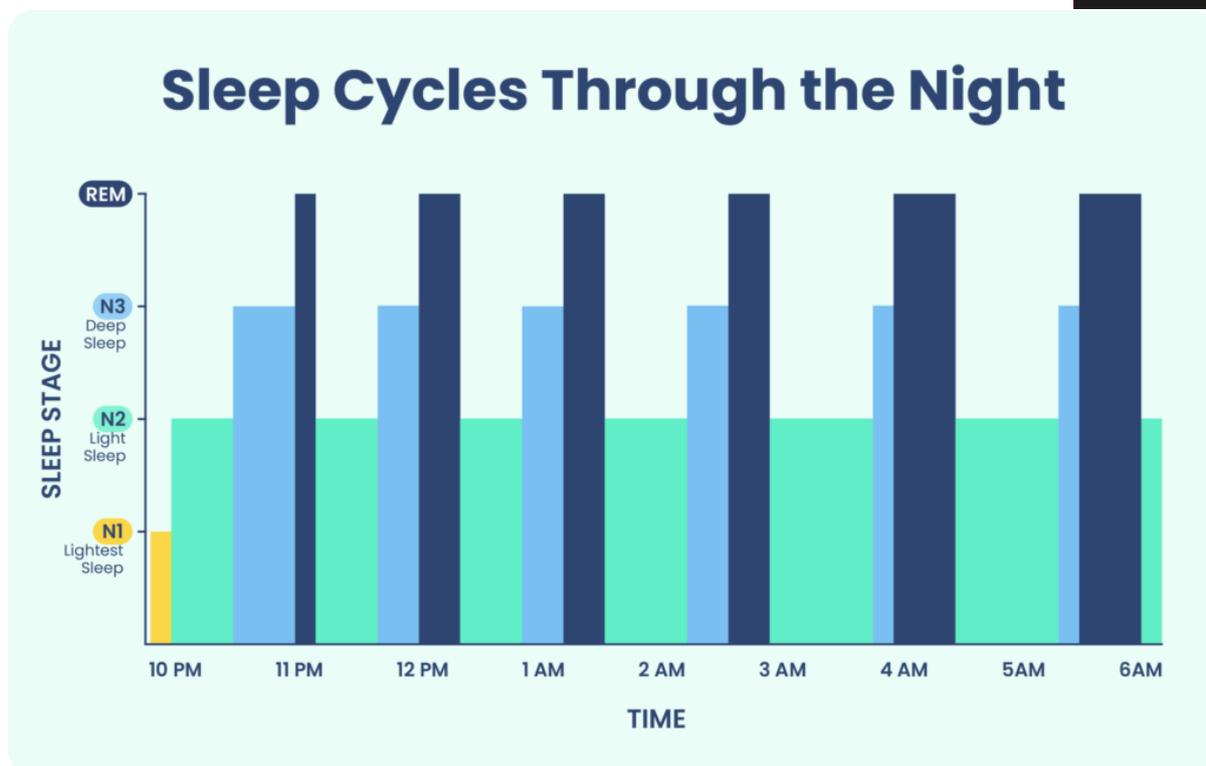
Sleep unfolds in cycles, each lasting about 90–120 minutes, and you go through several of these each night. Each cycle includes:

1. Non-REM Sleep

- ***Stage 1***: Light sleep—your body starts to relax, and you drift in and out.
- ***Stage 2***: Deeper relaxation—heart rate and temperature drop.
- ***Stage 3***: Deep sleep—this is when your body repairs tissue, builds bone and muscle, and strengthens the immune system.

2. REM Sleep (Rapid Eye Movement):

- This is when ****dreaming**** happens. Your brain becomes more active, but your body is temporarily paralyzed (so you don't act out your dreams).
- REM is crucial for ****memory consolidation****, learning, and emotional processing.



Graph image: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/stages-of-sleep>

What Regulates Sleep?

- Two main systems keep your sleep on track:

Circadian Rhythm: Your internal clock, synced to light and dark, tells your body when to feel sleepy or alert.

Sleep Pressure: The longer you're awake, the more pressure builds to sleep—thanks to a chemical called **adenosine**. Caffeine blocks this, which is why it keeps you awake.

- Hormones at Play

Melatonin: Rises in the evening to signal it's time to sleep.

Cortisol: Peaks in the morning to help you wake up.

Growth hormone: Released during deep sleep to aid in repair and regeneration.

- Why It Matters

Sleep isn't just rest—it's active maintenance. It helps:

- Clear waste from the brain



- Regulate mood and stress
- Support metabolism and immune function
- Improve memory and learning

Each stage of sleep plays a unique role in supporting mental health, and missing out on any of them can throw your emotional balance off-kilter.

The Sleep–Mental Health Connection

- **REM sleep**, where most dreaming occurs, is essential for *processing emotions* and consolidating positive memories. Without enough REM, people may become more emotionally reactive and less resilient to stress.
- **Deep non-REM sleep** helps restore the body and brain. It's linked to *mood regulation* and *cognitive clarity*. Poor deep sleep can lead to irritability, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating.

A Two-Way Street

Sleep and mental health have a **bidirectional relationship**:

- Poor sleep can *trigger or worsen* conditions like depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder.
- Mental health issues can *disrupt sleep*, creating a vicious cycle of insomnia and emotional distress.

What Happens When Sleep Cycles Are Off?

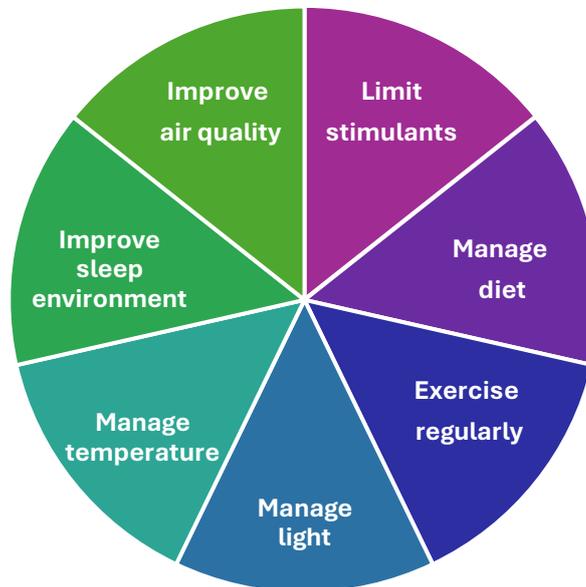
Increased risk of depression and anxiety: Sleep deprivation affects serotonin and dopamine levels—key mood-regulating chemicals.

- **Reduced emotional regulation:** The brain struggles to filter and manage emotional input, leading to heightened stress responses.
- **Cognitive fog:** Impaired memory, decision-making, and focus are common when sleep cycles are fragmented.

Why It Matters

Understanding this connection empowers people to take sleep seriously—not just as rest, but as a pillar of mental wellness. Even small improvements in sleep quality can lead to better mood, sharper thinking, and greater emotional resilience.

Sleep Hygiene Principles to Improve Sleep



- Limit alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine.
- Manage diet and times to eat especially before bedtime.
- Exercise regularly.
- Maximise daytime light exposure & being outside.
- Minimise nighttime light exposure including reduce blue light exposure before bed.
- Manage bedroom room & body temperature.
- Improve sleep environment by limiting noise and improving comfort.
- Improve air quality.
- Manage sleep routine by regulating your sleep schedule and sticking to it.
- Only use the bed for sex and sleep.
- Lie down when you feel sleepy.
- If you are in bed and awake for more than 15 minutes, then get up.
- No napping, use relaxation instead.

Sleep Diary



Why a Sleep Diary Helps

Spot Patterns: Tracks triggers like food, stress, or temperature that affect sleep and night sweats.

Guide Solutions: Helps tailor treatments or lifestyle changes.

Empowerment: Promotes reflection and a sense of control.

Better Appointments: Offers useful data for professionals if needed.

Shift Perspective: Turns frustration into curiosity—reframes sleep as something to learn from.

- This sleep diary is designed to keep a record of your experience of sleep.
- Please complete one column of the diary each morning, soon after you wake up.
- Take a few minutes to do this, trying to be as accurate as you can.
- However, it is your best estimate that we are looking for, as we don't want you to get into the habit of clockwatching at night.

NOTE: To calculate row 8 first add rows 4 (total time to get to sleep) to the total time awake in question 5 to get the total awake time during that amount from row 3 (Time in bed) to estimate your total length of sleep time.

		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Example
1	What time did you rise from bed this morning?								6.15am
2	At what time did you go to bed last night? (turned the light out)								11pm
3	How many hours between going to bed and getting up? (Time in bed)								7h 15m
4	How long did it take you to fall asleep (hrs)?								30m
5	How many times did you wake up during the night?								4
6	How many of these times were due to having a night sweat?								3
7	How long were you awake during the night? (In total i.e. Add 4 to the total time awake from when awake in 5)								30m + 1h 15m
8	About how long did you sleep altogether (hrs)? (3 - 7) (Total sleep time)								5h 30m

(Smith Balabanovich Hunter BMS, 2025)

Sleep Goals



Think of a couple of goals aimed at improving your sleep pattern. Choose simple, specific and achievable goals. Imagine how you will put your plan into action over the next week – which means when, where, how often, and for how long you will conduct your chosen behaviour.

1	What	
	When	
	Where	
	Frequency	
	Duration	

2	What	
	When	
	Where	
	Frequency	
	Duration	

(Smith Balabanovich Hunter BMS, 2025)

Breaking the Cycle of Worry

Sometimes the thoughts we have especially at night can be upsetting and cause us to become restless and agitated, the opposite of feeling relaxed. It is not surprising they keep us awake. We need to be in a state of relaxation in order for us to fall asleep.

So, manage the thoughts before they lead to worry, don't engage with them..... how?

- Allow thoughts to come and go, e.g. like a train passing through a station - just watch them passing by.
- Think about a pleasant, relaxing image and/ or use paced breathing and relaxation.
- Think of something that will take your attention, e.g. recall the story line from a book you have recently read but nothing too detailed or complex as that will make you more alert.



If the thought does take hold this might be because the thought is associated with fears

- Be firm in telling yourself that you will assign yourself a set 'worry time' or problem-solving time the next day (daytime) to use specifically for thinking about the problem that concerns you.
- Recognise the thought but let it flow over you, telling yourself that you will deal with the issue in 'worry time' the next day.
- Return to relaxation, paced breathing and pleasant imagery.

Our beliefs and attitudes do affect our sleep and how we feel the next day.

What helps?

- Try not to worry about sleep – your body will make up for lost sleep in time.
- Have realistic expectations - everyone, and especially those experiencing night sweats, will have a poor night's sleep occasionally.
- Recognising that not feeling completely rested some days is normal when you wake up EVEN AFTER a good night's sleep!
- Recognise too that there are some things within your control:
 - keeping your sleep schedule as regular as you are able.
 - cutting out negative lifestyle influences from your life and your bedroom area.
 - not napping in the daytime.
 - not spending too much time in bed

Don't:

- Exaggerate the seriousness of broken sleep as this can lead to more worry e.g. "I look 10 years older after no sleep last night" or "I woke last night so I'll feel terrible all day".
- Let your world revolve around sleep.
- Cancel activities as that gives you more time to worry about the upcoming night.

Do:

- Get on with normal life and activities even if you have had a bad night sleep - distracting activities can be relaxing, make you feel better and sleeping habits.
- Recognise that sleep problems are not dangerous.



Summary of Sleep Advice

Behaviours

Manage unhelpful environmental and lifestyle factors.

- Maintain a regular sleep pattern:
- Restrict time in your bed to your average actual sleep time.
- No napping.
- Keep to the 15min rule i.e. only lie down when tired and if lying awake for more than 15mins you need to get out of bed until you are tired.
- keep your bed for sleep and sex only.

Thinking

Manage worrying thoughts about any concerns you have and/or about sleep itself:

- Let the thoughts flow over you (as well as the night sweats).
- Don't engage with the thoughts.
- Use relaxing imagery and relaxation.
- Hold a flexible more accepting attitude (calming) rather than one of annoyance or exasperation (restlessness).
- Arrange to problem solve during the daytime for a set period of time.

Feelings

Practice relaxation to:

- Reduce overall stress by providing balance to busy lives as a technique to induce sleepiness when required.
- Develop a good bedtime wind-down routine.

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Disclaimer:

This information is intended to support understanding and self-help, but it does not replace professional medical advice or treatment. If you are in crisis, or your sleep difficulties are significantly affecting your safety or mental health, please contact the Samaritans on 116 123 or call 999..