

Understanding Your Sleep

A guide to better understanding adult sleep




Brought to you by the National Bed Federation





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Sleep

We all do it, but nearly half of us don't do it well; and whether you sleep well or not, it is essential to your health and wellbeing.

It's something that shouldn't be ignored. Everything is easier when you've had enough sleep.

If you're reading this guide, then chances are you are struggling with your sleep.

You're not alone.



4/10

Around four in 10 adults have a sleep issue at any given point.

You may believe you'll never sleep well, or that you're someone who just doesn't need a lot of sleep. You may also think you've tried everything and nothing works. We completely understand. We know it can be frustrating, and we also know it can feel very isolating and lonely when you are awake in the middle of the night. Please do not give up hope of getting a good night's sleep.

Reading this guide will hopefully give you a greater understanding of sleep and why you need it as well as helping you to realise how poor sleep can impact on your health and wellbeing. We'll share some of the most common reasons why people struggle to sleep, as well as our top advice to help YOU achieve a better quality night's sleep.

Even if you don't have a problem with your sleep at the moment, this guide is worth a read. By arming yourself with the right information and education, you will know how to look for early warning signs of sleep deprivation, and understand why you need to continue putting good habits in place. Never take your sleep for granted!



REMEMBER

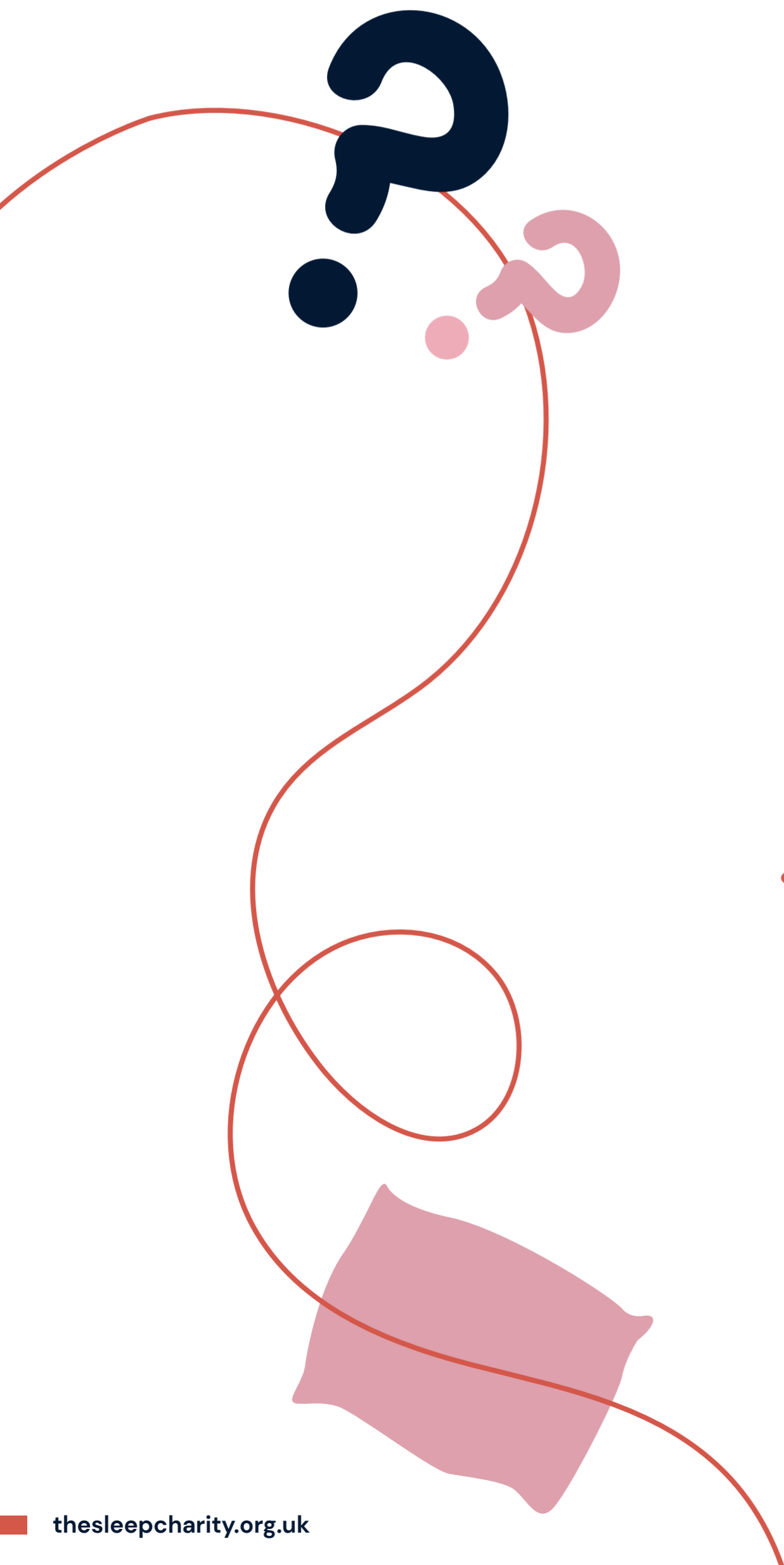
If you are concerned about your sleep, it's always important to speak to your GP or other health professional.

01

The Importance of Sleep



What is sleep and why do we do it?



It may, at first, seem glaringly obvious; however, the question of sleep is actually quite mysterious.

In simple terms, it is an extended bout of rest we experience on a daily basis, where we most often lay down with our eyes closed. But there's more to sleep than meets the eye.

Why does sleep matter?

While we still don't really know why we need sleep, we know we can't survive without it. It's vital for health and wellbeing, and not only do we function less when we don't get enough good quality sleep, but it can lead to long-term health problems. Sleep plays a huge part in regulating mood, improving memory, and maintaining health, weight and energy levels.

That's why we need to do all that we can to ensure that we enjoy quality sleep and quickly deal with niggling sleep issues before they turn into sleep problems or even sleep disorders.

?

DID YOU KNOW?

It has even been said that you could survive for three times as long without food as one could without sleep!

How much sleep do we need?

It's the question that gets asked time and time again! And the answer always remains the same. It varies!

The average person spends around a third of their life asleep. In this time, our bodies are able to replenish energy stores and make repairs, while our minds organise and store the memories of the day before. The amount of sleep you need depends on many different factors such as your age, sex, health and other elements. Plus our sleep patterns change as we grow older, impacting how we sleep.

If you think you're not sleeping enough it can cause you to worry. We are here to help you understand how to determine if you are getting the right amount of sleep and why not everyone needs the same number of hours per night. Remember, it's about the quality of your sleep not the quantity – and also it's not possible NEVER to sleep!

Just like a pair of shoes, no one size fits all and as we've already said, every one of you is an individual with varying sleep needs – some of us cope far better on less than others!

There is a general consensus that around seven to nine hours of sleep per night is recommended but anything between six and 10 hours is normal. Regularly getting less than six hours a night is not ideal.



DID YOU KNOW?

Research has found that those who frequently get fewer than six hours a night are at significantly increased risk of stroke and heart disease. Evidence suggests that not sleeping enough may ramp up the 'fight or flight' response to stress, releasing hormones that speed up heart rate and raise blood pressure.¹

Gauge how much sleep you need by how you feel the next day – you should feel refreshed. If you sleep 6.5 hours a night and feel great the next day, chances are that's the right amount of sleep for you and you don't need to force yourself to sleep any more.



Here is a quick look at the benefits of a good night's sleep



More energy



Less stressed



Alert



Positive



Focused



Look better – it's not called beauty sleep for nothing!



Motivated

Here are some of the impacts of poor sleep



Irritability



Slower reaction times



Impatience



Increased errors



Lack of concentration



Exhaustion



Problems with decision making



Health issues such as heart disease, obesity, Alzheimer's



DID YOU KNOW?

One study has shown that sleep deprivation has a bigger impact on reaction times while driving than alcohol consumption. It is vitally important to address the sleep issues in your life.²



Scale of sleep deprivation



INTERACTIVE - TICK THE BOXES THAT RELATE TO YOUR SLEEP



Checklist - signs I'm sleeping well

Falling asleep within 20 minutes

Falling back to sleep within 20 minutes if woken

Sleeping through the night with limited wakings

Feeling energised and refreshed in the morning



Checklist - signs I'm not sleeping well

Struggling to fall asleep

Unable to fall back asleep within 20 minutes once woken in the night

Waking several times in the night

Feeling tired and lethargic in a morning

02

Why We Sleep



Understanding sleep

You may feel overwhelmed by sleep issues and don't know where to begin. This is where we want to help. Our aim is to empower you with sleep information and knowledge so that you can then identify why you may be sleeping poorly, as well as being able to find suitable strategies that will help you to cope better.

By understanding a little more about the science of sleep, you will begin to identify why you may have some difficulties. Remember, you are an individual and your sleep needs are very personal – don't compare yourself to what others have or need. The key to a good night's sleep is working out your individual needs and putting strategies in place to meet these effectively.

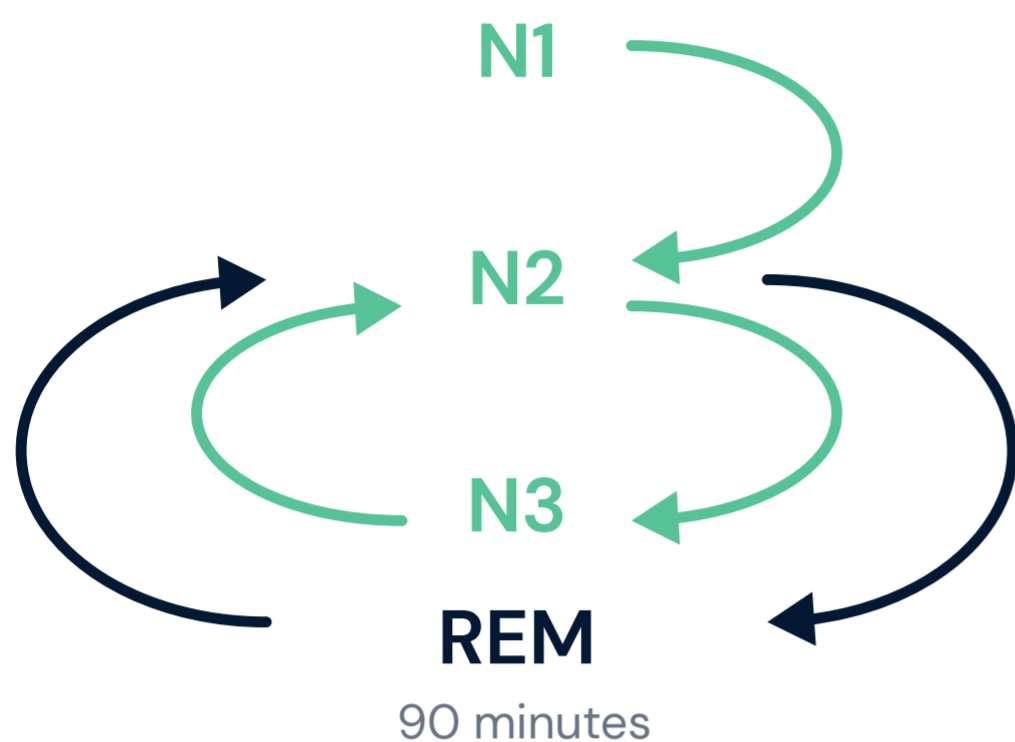


DID YOU KNOW?

You can't control or force sleep. If you were ordered to go to sleep right now and your reward would be £1 million, could you sleep? It would be highly unlikely, even though you would love to be able to do it. The more you force sleep, the more anxious and stressed you will feel.



What are the different stages of sleep?



We know that sleep is not a passive process and we experience complex changes in brain activity. An EEG (electroencephalogram) gives us an insight into the brain's electrical activity when we sleep. There are four STAGES of sleep that everyone goes through several times each night. These are made up of two TYPES of sleep: REM (rapid eye movement) and Non-REM.

When you first fall asleep you enter Non-REM sleep which is made up of three stages, each becoming progressively deeper. This is the restful and restorative sleep where your body is being repaired.



DID YOU KNOW?

Non-REM sleep lowers muscle tone, body temperature, heart rate and blood pressure.



Stage N1 is where you experience light sleep. This is when you are nodding off but can be easily woken by a slight sound or movement. It is often considered a state of transition between wakefulness and sleep.



Stage N2 is still a light sleep but slightly deeper than Stage N1. If left undisturbed, you continue to Stage N3.



Stage N3 (also called slow wave or deep sleep) is when you are in a deep sleep, are less responsive to noises and activity in your environment and may find it difficult to awaken. Some of you may feel disorientated if woken from this stage of sleep.



REM (rapid eye movement), the fourth stage of sleep, is where the body switches off and the brain receives extra blood and processes the day's events. This sleep consolidates learning and helps develop social and emotional abilities. In REM sleep you dream, and during this period of sleep your body is deeply relaxed.

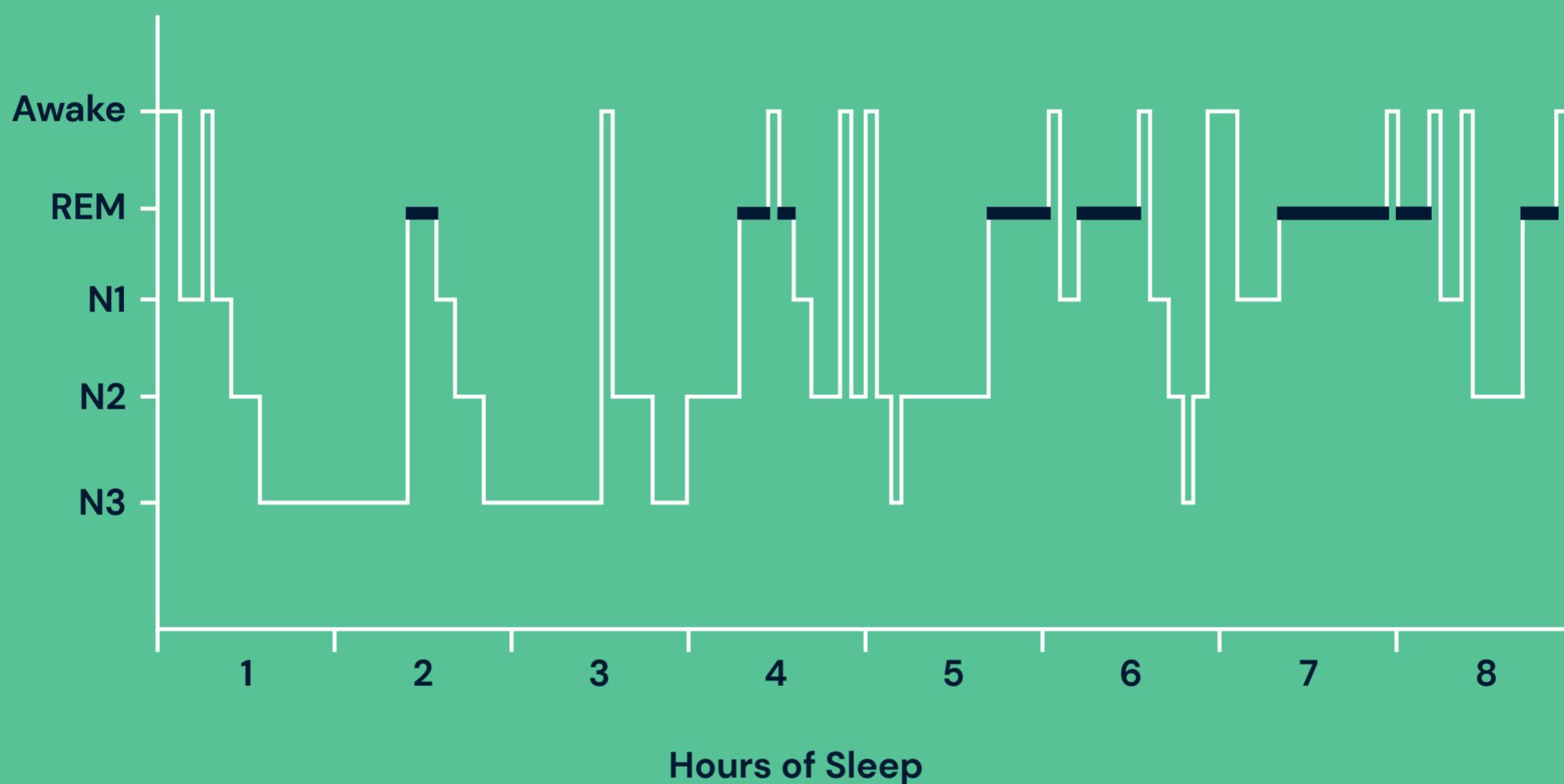
Each cycle lasts around 90 minutes and a good night's sleep usually consists of five cycles, whereas disturbed sleep consists of lots of shortened or incomplete cycles. REM sleep increases with each cycle and Stage N3 sleep decreases.



DID YOU KNOW?

Your sleep and its patterns will change as you get older – we'll cover more on this later!

The diagram below is called a hypnogram and shows the different stages of sleep that we have discussed.



When you move between stages, you experience what we call a 'partial waking'. Often, you are not aware of these and roll over, continuing to snooze. If anything has changed, however... that's when you wake up!

For example, if you have fallen asleep with a light on or the TV playing and your partner switches it off, this may trigger a waking. Or if you have invested in a product that provides light/sound and switches off, this too could cause you to wake. The key thing to learn from this is that conditions should be consistent all the way through the night to reduce your chances of waking once you have nodded off.



The important role of light and dark

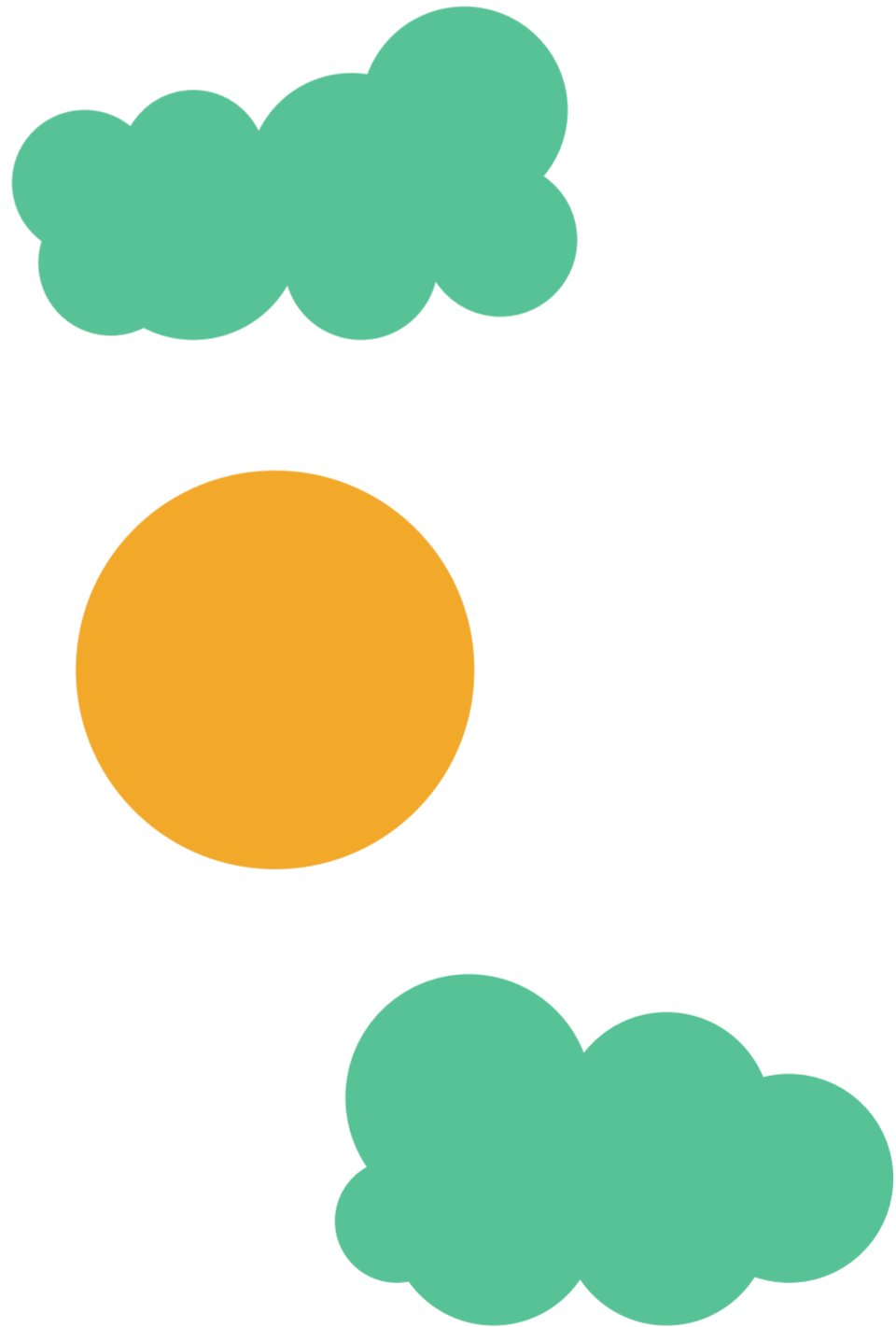
We all have an internal body clock that runs on roughly a 24-hour cycle, called the circadian rhythm. Light and darkness helps to regulate the body clock so that you go to sleep and wake up on the same schedule.

Darkness helps you to produce the sleep hormone 'melatonin' which makes you feel sleepy at bedtime. Exposure to natural daylight helps you to suppress melatonin and to feel more awake.



DID YOU KNOW?

Sometimes your body clock can go off track; for example when changing the clocks from winter time to summer time or travelling long haul.



In addition to the circadian rhythm, sleep is also regulated by the sleep/wake homeostasis.

This tells you when you are tired and need to rest. You build up a need for sleep during the day and then when bedtime comes you are tired and ready to rest.

Think of it like a battery. In the morning, after a good night's sleep, your battery is fully charged. As the day goes on, your battery depletes. If you have a nap that will charge it up a little more. The timing and duration of naps are important. Read more on napping on [page 18](#).



DID YOU KNOW?

After a waking period of around 15 hours the pressure to sleep becomes greater and greater, in other words, we get tired. In simple terms, the longer you are awake, the stronger your sleep pressure becomes!

It is important that we strengthen our body clocks by developing a regular sleep and wake up time - even at the weekend - with time to wind down sufficiently before bed.

It is usually a mismatch between the sleep/wake homeostasis, the circadian rhythm and/or the environment that causes difficulty with sleeping.





Are you an owl or a lark?

Larks and owls are what we call ‘chronotypes’ - individual differences in the timings of your circadian rhythm i.e. when you sleep and wake best! Most of us are one or the other, though some do fall in between.

Owls are people who go to bed late, sleep well into the morning, and tend to function better later in the day. Larks prefer to go to bed early and wake early and are more productive earlier in the day.

To some extent whether you are a night owl or a lark is genetically programmed and you can't change it. However, there are coping strategies to deal with the effects of going against your natural body clock.



TOP TIP

If you're an evening person, it may not be ideal to work as a milkman! On the opposite side to that, if you're a morning person, best avoid working late nights in a bar!



INTERACTIVE

How do I know if I'm an owl or lark? Take the quiz...

Do you wake up bright and alert by 6am?

Do you need to sleep until 11am to wake up feeling bright and alert?

Do you fall asleep easily if you go to bed at 9pm?

Do you have trouble falling asleep before midnight?

Do you find it hard to stay up until midnight?

Do you fall asleep quickly if you go to bed at 1am?

If you answered yes to all three questions, you are a lark.

If you answered yes to all three questions, you are an owl.

Napping – is it good or bad for you?

Napping is something that shouldn't be feared.

If you haven't slept well, or are feeling fatigued, a planned daytime nap can improve alertness and boost energy levels without affecting night time sleep – in fact it can give you as much energy as two cups of strong coffee with much longer lasting effects.

Napping checklist:



Try to nap between 1pm and 3pm so not to impact on night time sleep



20 to 30 minutes is enough to turn off the nervous system and recharge the whole body and improve alertness



Find a restful place to nap



Use eye mask or ear plugs to help block out light and sounds

Feel groggy in the morning?

If you've ever woken up feeling foggy, disorientated or drowsy, you're suffering from something called sleep inertia.

It occurs when you wake suddenly during deep (Stage N3) sleep. It usually lasts from around five to 30 minutes but sometimes can last longer. During this time you may feel like your concentration is impaired and you don't feel as alert.

Sleep inertia is often experienced after napping because you wake mid sleep cycle, which is why we always advise naps should be limited to around 20–30 minutes to prevent waking from deep sleep (see page 18).



TOP TIP

Sleep inertia can be worse, and may last longer, if you're sleep deprived.

The best way to avoid sleep inertia is to try to wake naturally, which is why it's important to have a regular routine in place.

Now that we have explored some of the basics around sleep – how it works and why it's important – we are going to move on to look at some of the more common reasons of poor sleep in adults.



03

Common Issues



Does it seem like it takes hours to fall asleep? Or do you wake in the middle of night and can't fall back to sleep? Or maybe you find yourself waking too early, desperate to grab a couple more hours? You may even suffer from sleeping too much and still feeling tired.

While we know it's important to get between 6 and 9 hours of sleep per night, what happens if that's not achievable?

Sleep issues are incredibly common, as we mentioned earlier, and many people can find it hard to drop off at night. Some of these may be out of your control such as pain management, underlying health issues or trauma, whereas others you can monitor and adjust, such as screen time and the bedroom environment. You may be experiencing some of these issues now or you might find they affect you in a few years' time.



REMEMBER

It's important to remember that there are lots of reasons why you might not be sleeping well and we hope you'll find some answers in this book.

Here are the most common problems that we see:

Stress and Worry

Our bodies can handle a moderate amount of stress, however, prolonged amounts of stress, or too much of it, not only harms your wellbeing but can also prevent you from getting a good quality night's sleep.



DID YOU KNOW?

In times of stress, we may under or over-eat, lose interest in activities, feel agitated and struggle to concentrate. You may also experience problems sleeping, with difficulties falling asleep and staying asleep.

Stress and worry causes hyperarousal – the heart rate goes up and in turn the mind starts to 'race', causing the brain to become alert and stimulated and start producing beta waves. This usually happens in people that worry about something when they're trying to get to sleep; instead of being calm and subdued, their brains are too aroused to sleep.

To make matters worse, once the brain is stimulated in this way, other worries are activated, making sleep even harder to achieve. As a pattern sets in, sleep becomes a thing of anxiety.



DID YOU KNOW?

Sleep deprivation can also increase stress and anxiety making it more difficult to nod off at night-time.

We have more on how to cope later in the guide and there is a list of helpful organisations in **Chapter 7** to help if you are feeling overwhelmed with stress and worry.



Mental health

There's a close relationship between sleep and mental health.

Lack of sleep can affect mental health, but mental health problems can also affect sleep, impacting both the quantity and the quality of it – so it's extremely important to look and address both issues. Ongoing poor sleep can be a huge risk factor for the development of major depressive disorders.³

Any health professional will always enquire about both mood and sleep behaviour when making any kind of diagnosis.

You're more likely to feel down when you are tired, too. Sleep has an important restorative function in 'recharging' the brain at the end of each day but also giving you the ability to manage and cope. This is why just having one bad night's sleep can make you feel low, emotional, and grumpy the next day.

Getting a good quality night's sleep and having a consistent routine can help you to cope better with the stress of life such as family issues, financial worries and work. You'll feel better in yourself and be able to manage your feelings and emotions in a more regulated way. Recognising and sorting out sleep problems as soon as they are identified is important to reduce the risk of anxiety and/or depression.



Partner disturbance

Sharing a bed with someone who snores, tosses and turns, or hogs the duvet can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. Having different night time routines and bedtimes can also play a part.

While you may believe you sleep better with your partner, in reality if your sleep habits don't match then it's probably better, for your sleep and your relationship, to sleep apart.

If you have a partner who regularly snores, it can also be extremely frustrating. Watch out for signs of sleep apnoea, a serious sleep disorder. This is where a person can stop breathing hundreds of times a night, causing many short awakenings which the sleeper is unaware of, leading to daytime fatigue and tiredness.



Bedroom environment

Light, noise, temperature or an uncomfortable bed can affect your sleep.

Consider whether the lighting in the room changes during the night. If you are used to going to sleep in complete darkness, it may be that you need to invest in heavy lined curtains or blackout blinds if you begin to wake early especially in the summer months.

Some people can sleep through any noise but most of us struggle to fall asleep in a noisy environment. Traffic, neighbours or barking dogs are just some of the sounds that may keep you awake at night and leave you feeling frustrated. Some of us are particularly noise sensitive and it may be that the clicking on and off of the heating, for example, is enough to wake you up.

When it comes to temperature, if you are too hot or too cold, it will impact on your sleep. We often tend to make the sleeping environment warmer than needed, thinking this might help with sleep when in fact a cooler room will aid better sleep.

Beds are where we are taught to sleep best – they have to feel comfortable. If you get up in the morning with aches, pains, stiffness or irritations then you need to consider whether your mattress is the problem. Find out more about mattresses on [page 43](#).





Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle consisting of adequate and sensible nutrition and sufficient exercise is important for good sleep.



DID YOU KNOW?

Do you have a routine in place? Many of us give up on routines because we believe they don't work. But did you know that doing the same thing at the same time each night helps to strengthen the circadian rhythm?

Modern day lifestyles are fast paced and full of stimulation. You might put on the radio or television to check on the news, check emails constantly throughout the day, sit at your computers and/or watch television late into the evening. It barely stops and it can be difficult to switch off and wind down, so it's no wonder that many of us have trouble sleeping.

Sometimes the fast-paced life means there is limited time to exercise (or only opportunities to work out too late at night) or to make healthy meals. Equally if you're sleep deprived you may lack the motivation to move your body or eat well.

Your diet can impact on your night time sleep too. Eating large, heavy and processed, fatty or spicy meals before bed can cause indigestion and heartburn especially if you easily suffer from stomach upset.

Caffeine can also influence how long it takes you to fall asleep, how long you sleep for, and the quality of your sleep. Caffeine is also hidden in lots of products that we might associate with bedtime, such as hot drinks like tea, coffee and hot chocolate. It's best to avoid them in the evening before bed if you are sensitive to caffeine.



DID YOU KNOW?

The half-life of caffeine is around 5 hours. That means it takes five hours for just half of the caffeine you have consumed to leave the body!⁴



Alcohol and smoking

Alcohol is a commonly used sleep aid, with many believing that alcohol helps them to fall asleep and sleep better throughout the night.

Too much alcohol, especially late at night, can play havoc with sleep patterns, as well as disrupting vital brain functions. Some of the main effects of alcohol consumption are losing quality sleep, snoring, too many loo breaks and dehydration. Waking up deprived of the vital sleep your body needs will leave you feeling drained and, if experienced night after night, can seriously affect your health and wellbeing.

Similar to caffeine, nicotine is a stimulant that can keep you awake. It should be avoided in the later part of the evening, ideally at least four hours before bedtime, and during the night if you happen to wake up. Nicotine patches and gum can also affect sleep.





Being a parent or carer

When your child has sleep issues, it impacts negatively on your sleep. Dealing with a child who is up during the night can really test your patience and you may be snappier than usual or may remove boundaries you have put in place to pacify them - this is all normal and because you are worn out. If your child is keeping you up at night, please download our children's sleep eBook [here](#).

Being a carer can also bring with it many challenges and your quality of sleep can suffer. Factors such as stress, interrupted nights, or money worries can all have a negative effect on sleep patterns and make life more challenging.





Work

In today's busy lifestyle, we're all very eager to believe that sleeping one hour less will give us one more hour of productivity, but in reality it's likely to have the opposite effect. Earlier in this guide, we explored how lack of sleep has a damaging effect on our physical and mental health.



DID YOU KNOW?

Each hour of sleep lost per night is associated with a temporary loss of **one IQ point**.⁵

There are many dangers of being sleepy at work too – especially if your job involves driving or operating any kind of machinery. If you're sleep deprived, not only are you less alert but you're less likely to make good decisions, focus on tasks or manage in a friendly mood.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you also know that if a worker loses just one night of sleep, their cognitive ability is roughly the same as being over the legal alcohol limit*?⁶

It's easy to burn the candle at both ends with work pressures, long hours, stress and socialising after work.

Shift workers are at an increased risk of not getting enough sleep. Some may work a week of nights, others may have mixed rotating shifts, making it difficult to get into any kind of routine. It can cause chronic sleep deprivation which has serious implication on health, productivity and safety.

Daytime sleep is less efficient than night-time sleep, as you're constantly battling against disturbance factors – such as light, noise etc – and challenging your body's natural circadian clock. It's important, with shift work, that bedtime routines should be taken from environmental cues rather than timings.



♀ Menopause

Women experience changes in hormone levels as they age which can cause sleep disturbances. Sleep disturbances can alter hormone levels, turning into a vicious cycle.

Menopause can be a key trigger of insomnia because of some of the physiological and psychological changes women experience when going through the menopause. Menopause-related insomnia can stretch on for weeks and even months, if not properly treated.

In peri- and post-menopause, many women have trouble getting to sleep and staying asleep. This can be accompanied by hot flushes (due to fluctuations in oestrogen and progesterone levels) which can cause more awakenings, restless legs syndrome (a nervous condition with an overwhelming irresistible urge to move the legs) and sleep disordered breathing such as obstructive sleep apnoea.

Not getting enough good sleep can affect all areas of life and sleep issues are often accompanied with low mood and anxiety.

Ageing

There's a common misconception that older people don't need as much as sleep but that's not entirely true.

Older adults still need around 5–9 hours per night but sleep quality deteriorates and there are changes in sleeping patterns, with a loss of Stage N3 sleep (deep sleep). Earlier in this guide, we talked about how deep sleep is associated with physical health, helping to fight off illnesses and memory retention. As you age, spending more time in the lighter stages of sleep means you wake more frequently and easily and feel less rested come morning.



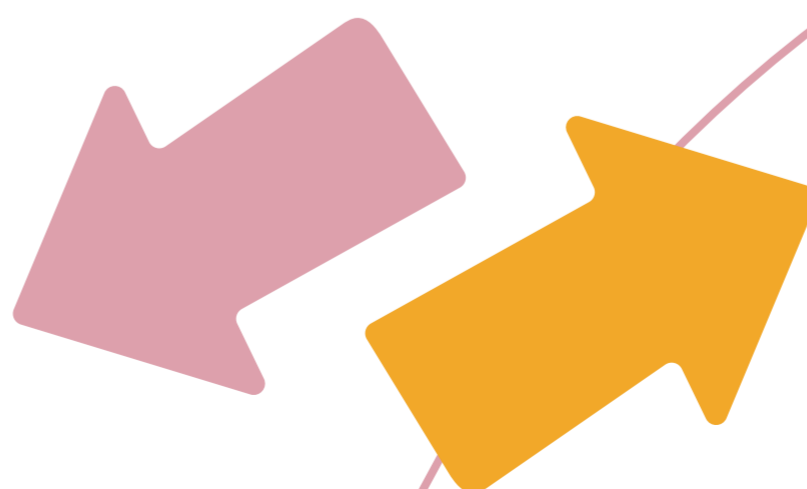
DID YOU KNOW?

2%

We lose 2% of our deep sleep each decade after adolescence. By the time we hit 60, we are getting around half as much deep sleep as we were at the age of 20.⁷

The timing of sleep also changes as you get older and you naturally become more of a morning person. Your circadian rhythm shifts forward (you can't change this!) and you will feel more tired earlier in the afternoon and find that you want to wake earlier in the morning. On top of that, production of melatonin (the sleep hormone) decreases with each decade which, all together, are factors for having sleep issues.

Understanding these changes can help you to sleep better.





Retirement

Transitioning into reduced working hours or retirement can have an impact on your sleep.

Without the demand of work and a regular schedule and routine, some of us can find sleep problematic. Setting an alarm for work reinforces a consistent wake time and this can change in retirement leading to an irregular sleep pattern.

As you get older, you tend to have less structure to when and where you sleep, which is why we see more daytime napping. However, napping does diminish your sleep pressure (sleep pressure is what builds during the day so that you feel sleepy at bedtime) and this can be why you may have difficulties with falling asleep at night-time; because you may be napping at inappropriate times. Sleep pressure takes longer to build up as we get older, too.

There is also a noticeable shift in daytime activities which impact on sleep quality and quantity. Some older people might get less access to natural daylight, which is needed to regulate melatonin levels. You might also experience a reduction in physical activity and a lack of social engagement. These can lower energy and alertness levels but also don't help to prepare the body for sleep. Other significant life changes such as a bereavement or loss of independence can increase stress and anxiety which can also contribute to sleep issues.



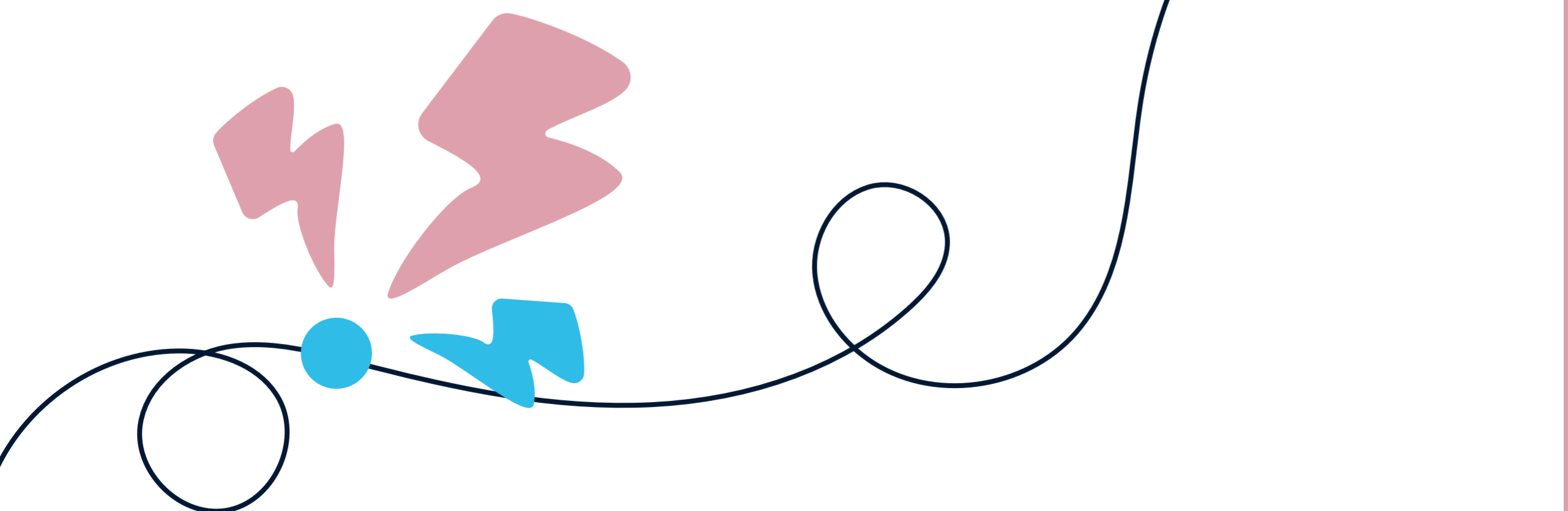
Other health/medical conditions

As we age, many people will experience deteriorating health. Chronic illnesses and medications can have an impact on your sleep and this can result in frustration at night and exhaustion during the day.

Pain makes getting comfortable in bed harder, and you should seek advice from a medical professional if you are concerned. While your sleep issues may have started because of pain, if you've had sleep difficulties at least three times a week for more than three months then it's likely that there are also other factors contributing to your sleep issues including stress, unhelpful thoughts etc.

It is also worth checking if any medication that you are taking may be impacting on your sleep, as many medications can make you more drowsy or more alert.

As you get older, there's a higher risk of health conditions that can compromise sleep; for example, heart disease, diabetes and bladder problems. We know that night time urination increases with age and this contributes to more increased sleep disruptions. Some people with chronic illness may also suffer with mental health issues too which further impacts on sleep.





Significant Life Events

If you've experienced a loss, bereavement or trauma, it is common to have disturbed sleep, in particular, trouble falling asleep and spending time in the deep stages of sleep. Grief triggers the stress response and increases our levels of cortisol, resulting in greater alertness and frequent waking.



Sleep Disorders

A sleep disorder is not just a niggling sleep issue. It is a medical condition that impacts on your everyday life.

The main ones to be aware of are:



Insomnia

Insomnia is thought to affect around 1 in every 3 people in the UK and it is where people have extreme difficulty getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking too early.

Anxiety, stress and depression are the most common causes of chronic insomnia. Most of us will experience short periods of insomnia (acute insomnia), of which is often corrected when a particular situation or worry has been eased. However, if insomnia becomes a regular occurrence (at least three nights a week for more than three months) and is leaving you feel fatigued, talk to your GP about treatment.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is a common treatment for insomnia and you can find out more about this in [Chapter 4](#).

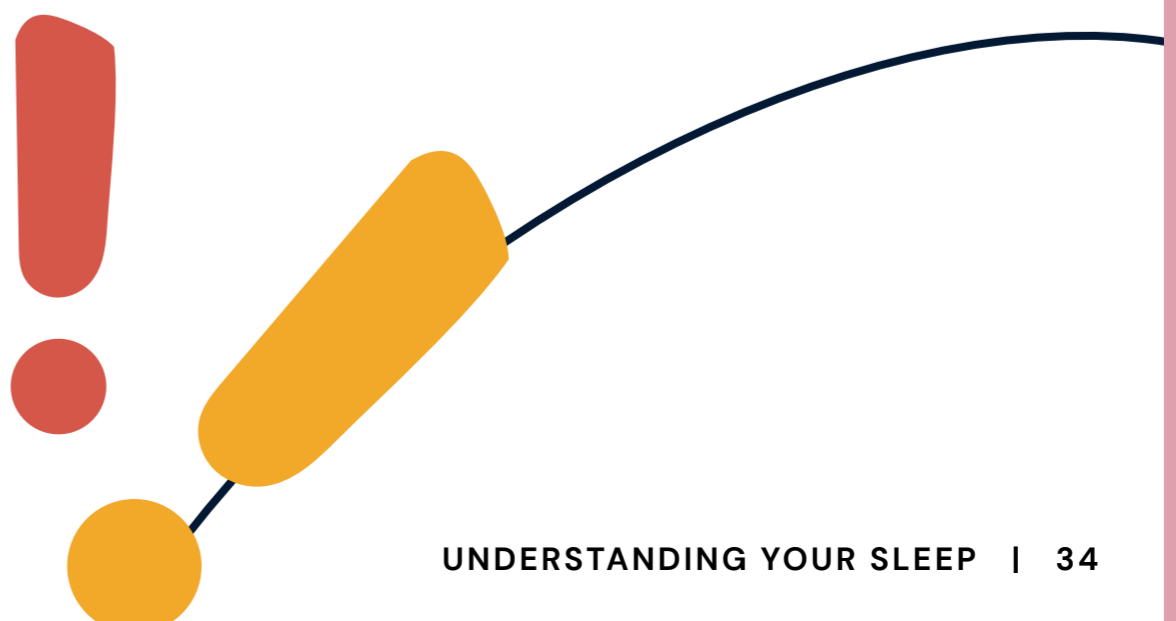


Sleep apnoea

People with sleep apnoea have short pauses in breathing while they are asleep. These pauses may happen many times during the night.

If not treated, sleep apnoea can lead to other problems, such as high blood pressure, stroke, or memory loss.

You can have sleep apnoea and not even know it. Feeling sleepy during the day and being told you are snoring loudly at night could be signs that you have sleep apnoea.





Sleep Disorders



Restless legs syndrome (RLS)

RLS is where there is an overwhelming desire to move the legs. It can cause an uncomfortable 'crawling' sensation as well as burning, tingling and throbbing.



DID YOU KNOW?

1/10

Around 1 in 10 are affected by RLS at some point in their life. It can be made worse by long periods of sitting down in an evening when trying to get to sleep, genetics, pregnancy and iron deficiency.

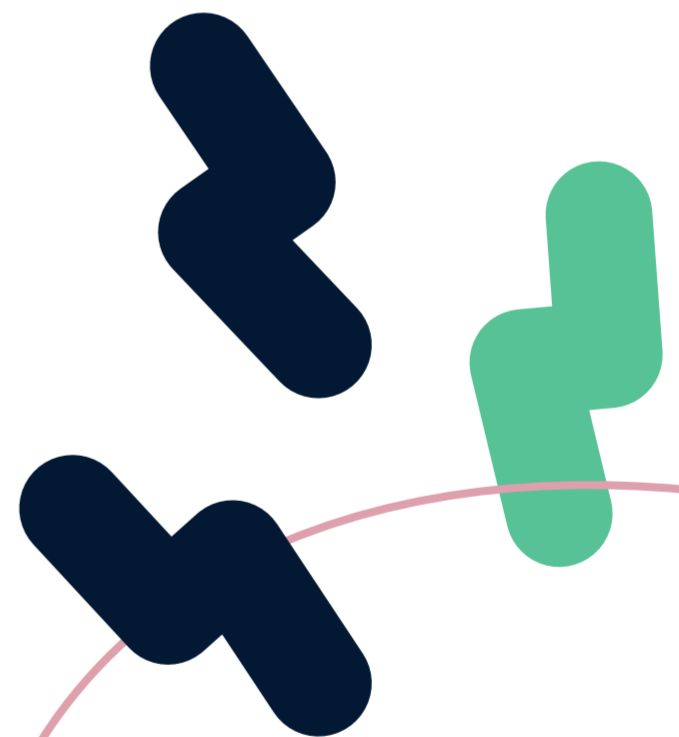


Narcolepsy

This is a rare, long term, neurological condition that causes you to suddenly fall asleep at inappropriate times as the brain is unable to regulate the normal sleep-wake cycle.

It can have a significant impact on daily life and can be difficult to cope with emotionally.

According to Narcolepsy UK, there are around 30,000 sufferers in the UK – this would fill a third of Wembley Stadium.



What happens if I don't make changes?

Sleep issues are very rarely resolved without some form of intervention. The likelihood is that if you don't make some changes they could continue for a long period of time or even get worse.

Changing sleep habits is hard. It takes determination and you must be absolutely consistent in your approach.

We will explore the kinds of changes you could consider making that will have a positive impact in the next chapter.



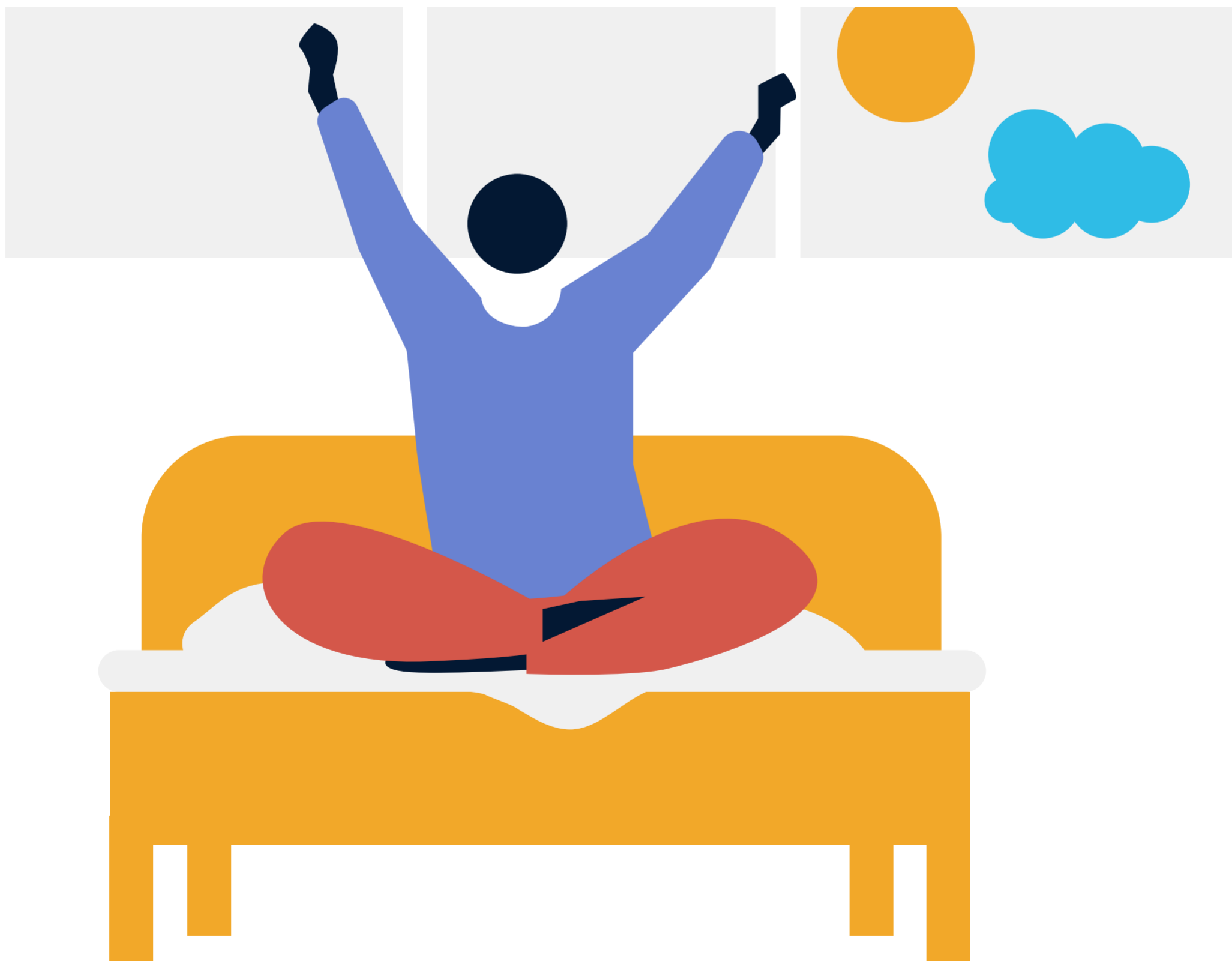
REMEMBER

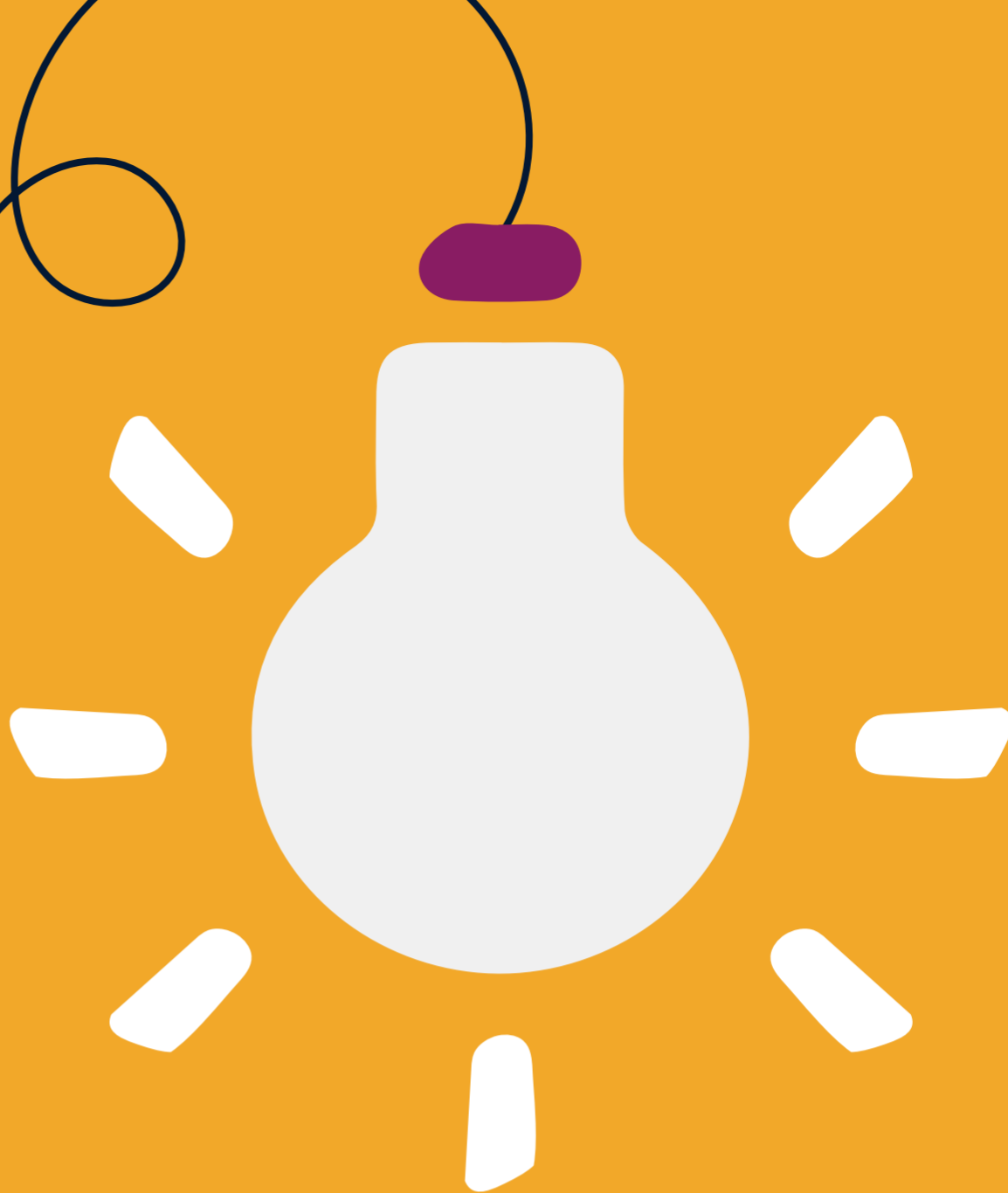
Remember sleep is essential to your physical, emotional and mental wellbeing – yet it often goes unrecognised.



04

Practical strategies & advice





Now that you understand the basics of sleep and the kind of things that contribute to sleep issues, we're going to consider strategies that you can try at home to help you switch off and enjoy a better night's sleep. This is sometimes referred to as 'sleep hygiene'.



REMEMBER

There can be more than one reason for your sleep issues, so it's important to take time to consider what these are otherwise you may choose strategies that aren't useful and feel frustrated that the issue hasn't improved.



Keeping regular hours

Keeping regular hours helps to programme the body to sleep better. Go to bed when you feel sleepy, and try to wake up at the same time every day, including weekends! You will soon start to feel tired at the same time every day.



Switch off the screens!

Using screens such as televisions, game consoles and mobile phones is best avoided in the hour leading up to bedtime. Not only are these usually visually stimulating but they produce blue light that acts like sunlight, sending a signal to the brain to stop producing melatonin. You may consider using a blue light filter screen to help, but it's best to try to switch off completely.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to some research, using screens before you go to bed can double the length of time it takes you to fall asleep.⁸





Routines are important

Everyone benefits from having a routine in the run up to bedtime - especially adults!

For something to become routine it needs to be repeated a number of times, consistently, at the same time each day. It can help prepare your mind and body for bed.

A routine should last around an hour and be screen free. Look at alternative ways of relaxing. You may factor in a warm bath or some meditation, or you may even prefer to settle down with a good book or complete a jigsaw. Just make sure it's right and enjoyable for you.

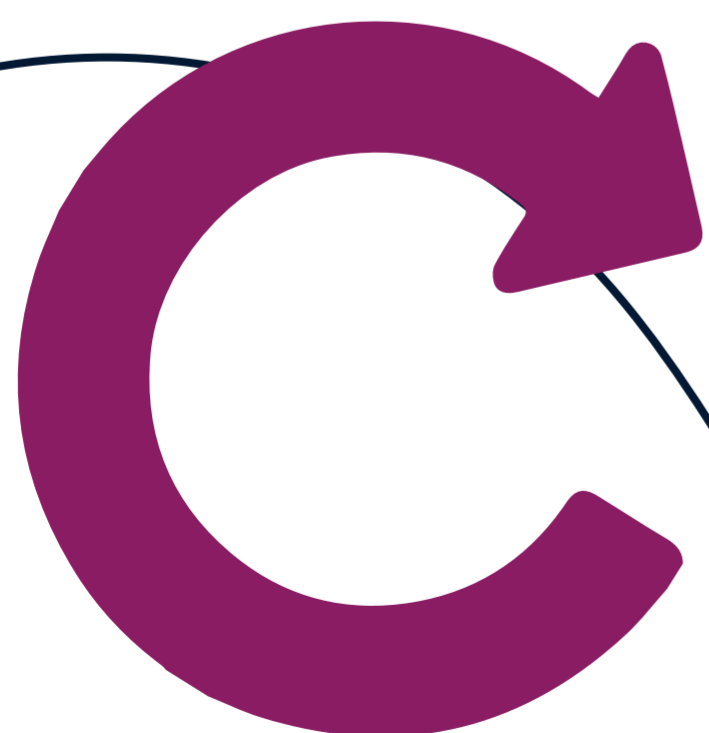


A daily dose of natural light

Even on cloudy days, natural light helps reset our internal body clock. It helps us get over feeling groggy when we have just woken up and makes us more alert.

Get out into the natural light as soon as you can after waking up, and preferably around the same time every day.

Our circadian rhythm naturally has a dip in the afternoon, so a walk or getting some fresh air at this time can help with that post-lunch slump we often feel, re-boosting our energy levels.





Perfect bedroom environment

You need the right environment to get a good night's sleep and that means a bedroom that's pleasant, inviting and welcoming. We all fall to sleep more easily when we are in a comfortable, safe and secure setting.

It's time to think about your sleeping environment and see if there are any changes you can make. Here are some ideas:



Choose suitable curtains to darken the environment.

Blackout blinds can be particularly helpful in the summer months.



Make sure your room isn't too hot or too cold.

Keep it slightly cool around 16–18°C (60–65°F). You may need it slightly cooler if you're experiencing menopausal symptoms.



Keep clutter out of your room.

Put the laundry basket in the spare room, bathroom or the landing, and keep your room as tidy as possible.



Avoid having a television or computer in the bedroom.

So you aren't tempted by screen time before sleep.



A quiet room can encourage better sleep.

White noise can work well to mask out background noise. You can buy white noise machines that can be left on throughout the night.



Turn off or put your mobile phone into night mode.

You should also try to eliminate anything with an LED display (including clocks).



Perfect bedroom environment



Don't treat your bedroom as an extension of your living room or a study.

Use it for sleeping and sex only.



Adorn your bedroom with beautiful things such as photographs of loved ones, artwork that you like, plants and flowers.

It will help you feel more connected to the room and look forward to going to bed.



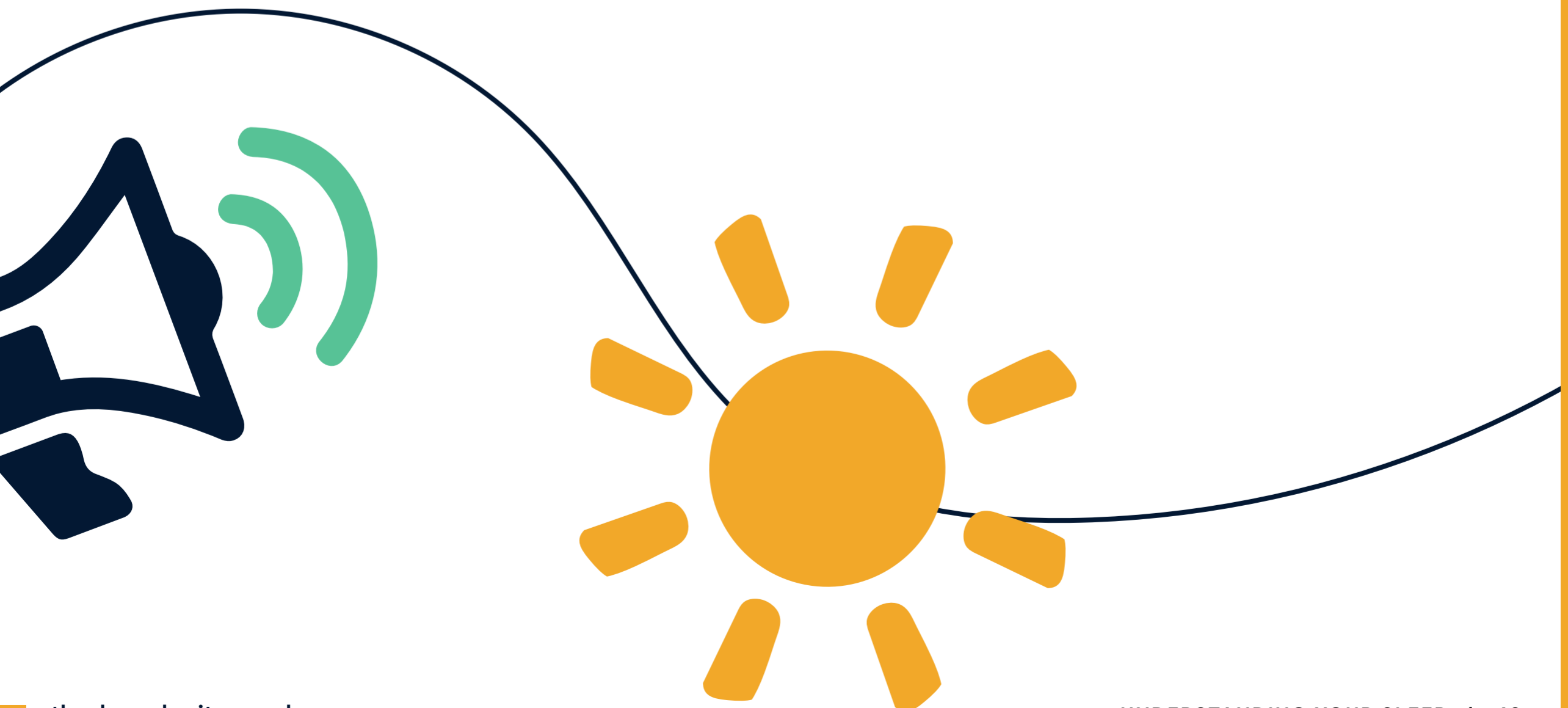
Try to avoid bright colours, such as reds, when decorating your room.

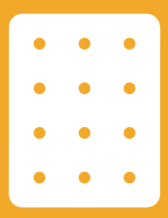
Some bright colours are less restful, quite stimulating, and less conducive to a good nights' sleep. Use muted and pastel colours to create a more calming environment.



Some smells can affect your mood, making you more relaxed and calm.

Use reed diffusers with essential oils of lavender or geranium, wax melts or candles. Do not use during pregnancy or in children's rooms.





The Mattress Matters

Making sure the bedroom is cool, dark and quiet can improve the quality of our sleep as can sleeping on a comfortable, supportive bed. Some people spend more on the latest iPhone or TV than they do on their mattress.

The right mattress can make the difference between a restorative night's sleep and poor quality sleep resulting in tiredness and fatigue. Lack of support from a mattress reinforces poor sleeping posture and can prevent you from getting a good night's sleep. For help on choosing a new mattress please see our Useful Resources.

Don't forget that if you're sleeping on the same bed you had when you were younger, it might not be fit for purpose. As we get older, our comfort levels do change and if you're suffering with pain you may need something a little more supportive.

If you have a partner who disturbs your sleep from tossing and turning, you might find you sleep better in a bigger bed so there is less disturbance – size does matter!



TOP TIP

If you sleep better in a hotel or another bed away from home; or are waking up with aches and pains which wear off as the day progresses, it may be time to change your bed.



Managing stress

We talked earlier in **Chapter 3** about how stress can impact on your sleep. It's important to manage your stress levels so that you're relaxed before bed.



Separate home life and work life

Try to ensure you have a good work/life balance, especially as more people work at home than ever before.

It's important to put boundaries in place, learn to say 'no' and stick to a regular routine. For example, don't be tempted to 'be available' at all times and stop looking at work emails after 6pm.



Practise relaxation

Either use relaxation techniques or do something that keeps you calm. This is especially important on the run up to bedtime.

One way to manage and slow your heart rate is to place your hand on your heart and quiet yourself so that you can hear it beating. Then breathe in deeply and slowly for three or four seconds, then breathe out for three or four seconds. Repeat this until you feel your heart rate slowing down. This will then slow the busy brain activity.



3/4 seconds



3/4 seconds





Write down or share worries

Stress and worry are the top reasons why people don't sleep well. It can be helpful to write down any troubling thoughts or even a to-do list before bed; this can be very therapeutic.

Sharing your problems – whether that's with family/friends/work or a professional – can also help to reduce stress and relieve anxiety.



Avoid clock watching

It is common to watch the clock when we are awake at night.

For some of you, this can increase your anxiety levels and further prevent you from being able to fall asleep. It is not necessary to remove the clock altogether as many people rely on their alarm clocks to get them up in the morning. However, having the clock face out of sight will help reduce any sleep anxiety.



Do some exercise

Exercise may not solve problems, but it can help put you in the right frame of mind to do so.

Physical activity helps to reduce the adrenaline, caused by pressure and anger, by producing 'good mood' endorphins. Regular exercise not only helps to reduce stress but it also improves sleep.



TOP TIP

If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. If after **30 minutes** you've not fallen asleep, get up and do something you find relaxing until you feel sleepy again – then go back to bed.





Ways to relax

Stressful lifestyles, working late, worrying, watching intense television shows or even the news are some of the factors that can contribute to the mind racing and being unable to wind down.



REMEMBER

You want to be stress, worry and anger free when it comes to bedtime, so make sure you resolve any arguments and address any issues before bed!

Many people tell us that they wake between 2am and 4am, unable to drift back to sleep due to racing minds. It's important to know the importance of being relaxed before going to bed, and to have the knowledge of effective relaxation techniques to apply in order to experience deep, restful sleep.

You may find it helpful to introduce some simple relaxation and mindfulness techniques such as these:

Mindfulness - use your senses



Notice 5 things
you can see



Notice 4 things
you can feel



Notice 3 things
you can hear



Notice 2 things
you can smell



Notice 1 thing you
can taste

If you are concerned about your anxiety levels, you should always discuss this with a professional.



Ways to relax

Breathing

In bed, focus on your breath going in and out. Experience each breath and pay attention to how this makes you feel.

You could also try the 7/11 breathing exercise. This is where you breathe in deeply whilst counting to 7, then breathe out slowly to the count of 11. Repeating this for a few minutes can help you feel calm and relaxed and can help you avoid being consumed by negative thoughts. This can also be a very useful technique that you can try if you feel stressed.

Relax your body

This can be done in bed and works by relaxing separate groups of muscles. It is also effective to visualise each set of muscles being relaxed as you go through the exercise:

1. Tense a muscle by contracting and flexing for 7-10 seconds. Don't strain the muscle.
2. Visualise the muscle being tensed and feel the build up of tension.
3. Release each muscle abruptly, then relax, allowing the body to go limp before going on to the next muscle.
4. Keep other muscles relaxed whilst working on a particular muscle.





Ways to relax

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)

CBT-I should be the first line treatment for someone who is diagnosed with insomnia.

It is usually delivered over six to eight sessions, although there are shorter versions that can be as effective.

It helps identify the negative attitudes and beliefs that hinder your sleep, and replaces them with positive thoughts, so you 'unlearn' the negative beliefs.

CBT-I consists of:

- **Stimulus control** – to build a strong association between the bed and sleep
- **Sleep restriction** – restricting the amount of time in bed to the number of hours that you sleep. For example, if you only get five hours of sleep per night, even though you spend seven hours in bed, you limit yourself to five hours in bed at night.
- **Sleep hygiene** – general advice on how to look after your sleep

CBT-I is available on the NHS, face to face and online – but not all hospital trusts have the capacity to offer it. If you are looking for a private CBT-I therapist please ensure you do your homework and check they are suitably qualified.



Prescribed sleep medication

Sleeping pills can be helpful for an acute sleep issue and you may get a short term prescription for a few days to help. However, they have serious side effects and so GPs rarely prescribe them as you can become dependent on them.

Sleeping pills do not tackle the root of a sleep problem so it's important that you look at alternative ways such as behavioural therapy, CBT-I.

05

Sleep diaries



If you are worried about your sleep, keeping a sleep diary may be helpful.

Sleep diaries can help you to find reasons why you are not sleeping. Sometimes your sleep troubles are a result of bad sleep habits for example drinking too much caffeine before bedtime, not exercising or poor sleep hygiene.

If you need to see a GP or healthcare professional about your sleep issues you will have evidence of your sleep-wake pattern which can help with a diagnosis and treatment.

How to use one

It is important that you log everything for at least two weeks to see if any patterns emerge.

- Always keep it by your bed and record any activity immediately or you are likely to forget
- It should only take a few minutes to complete each day
- If you need more space, you can photocopy the diary to enlarge it
- If you sleep elsewhere, mark on the diary which these nights are so that it is clear when you were in a different sleep environment
- Try to keep the diary at a time when life is typical, avoid holidays

DOWNLOAD A COPY OF OUR SLEEP DIARY HERE 



SLEEP DIARY: MORNING

Complete each morning

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
START DATE							
What time did you go to bed last night?							
What time did you wake this morning?							
How long did it take you to first fall asleep (in minutes)?							
Did you fall asleep: Early After some time With difficulty							
How many times did you wake in the night?							
How long were you awake during the night in total?							
What disturbed your sleep? (unusual or mental factors such as stress, worry, noise, lights, comfort etc)							
How would you rate your quality of sleep from 1-5? (with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good)							
How do you feel this morning: Refreshed OK Lethargic							
Any other notes							

thesleepcharity.org.uk

What Do the Results Mean?

Once you have completed a diary for a period of two weeks, it is time to review the information for any patterns. Important things to note are:



The length of time it takes you to nod off at the start of the night. If it is more than 30 minutes this needs to be a focus and may indicate that you need a slightly later bedtime.



The time you wake in the morning should be consistent throughout the week to strengthen your circadian rhythm. Likewise, the time you fall to sleep should be the same - routine is key when it comes to sleep and keeping your body clock on track.



Once you are asleep, do you wake during the night? If so, can you identify a reason for this? Has anything changed since you went to bed? Think about the light, noise etc.



The amount of sleep you are getting each night can now be calculated using the diaries.



Day time naps, whether they are appropriate, and if they are too early or late. Too early could mean you are sleep deprived and need more night time sleep. If you have a nap too late in the day, it can impact on your sleep drive and you may not be tired when it comes to bedtime.



Sharing this information with a professional can be helpful - sometimes it is hard to identify sleep issues on our own. If you are worried you should get support as soon as possible.

06

When to ask for help



06 WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

It's important to inform a healthcare practitioner if you are worried about your sleep.

When you should see your GP



If your partner notices any unusual movements during your sleep or breathing patterns

3+

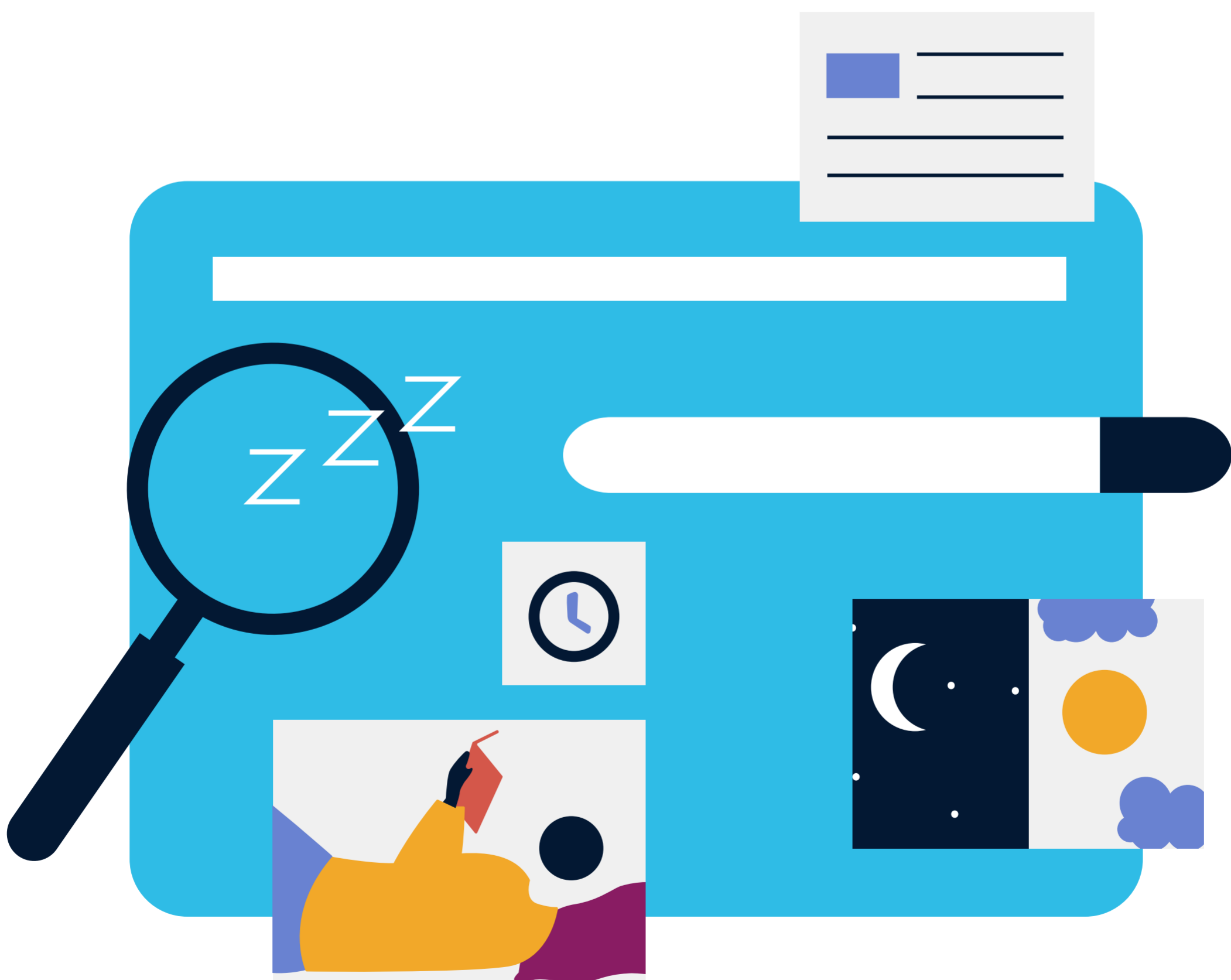
If your sleep issues have been going on for longer than three months, and for more than three nights per week



If you show any signs of other sleep disorder or underlying health conditions

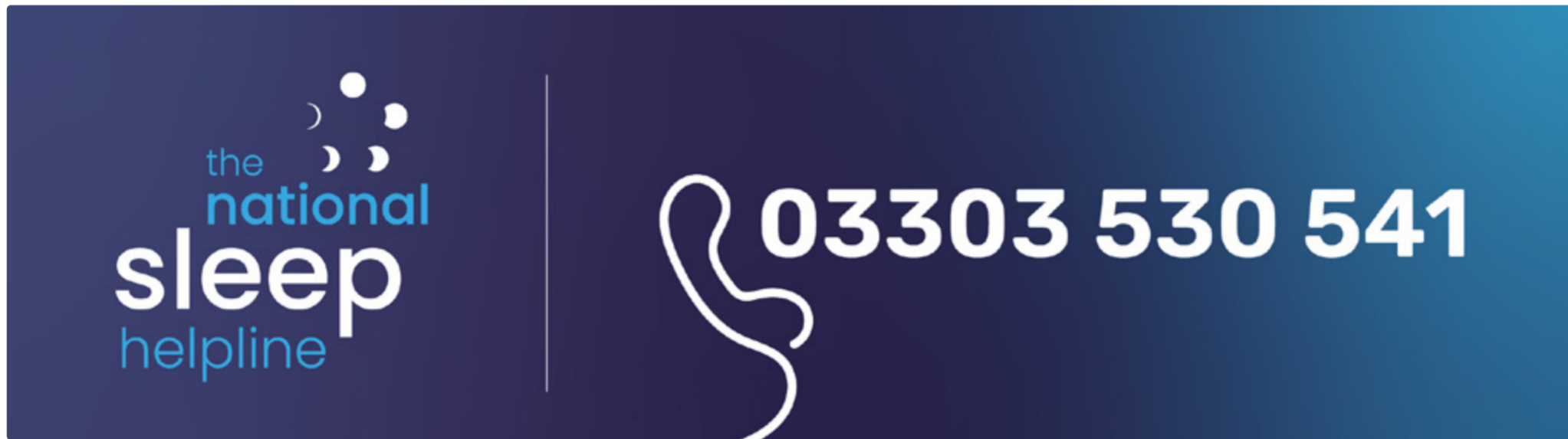
07

Useful resources



It's important to look after yourself but sometimes we all need a little extra help. However, you may find it difficult to know who to turn to.

Here are some resources that may be useful.



The National Sleep Helpline is run by The Sleep Charity. More information on the opening hours can be found on our website

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Anxiety UK

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Back Care

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Bed Advice UK

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Calm

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

CPAP

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Headspace

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Hope2Sleep

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Mental Health Foundation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Mind

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Narcolepsy Association UK

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

National Bed Federation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Night Club

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Sleep Apnoea Trust

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Talkhealth Partnership

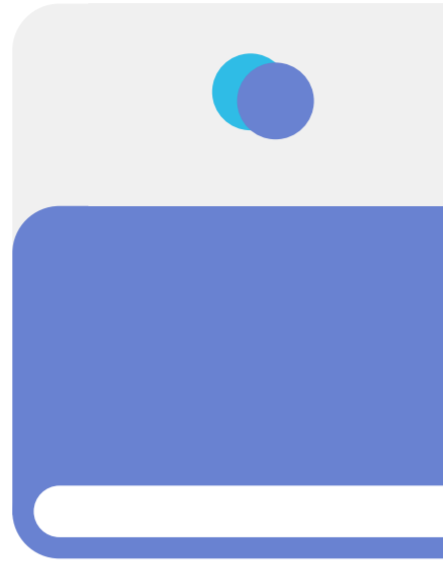
[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Useful books



The One Week Insomnia Cure

Professor Jason Ellis



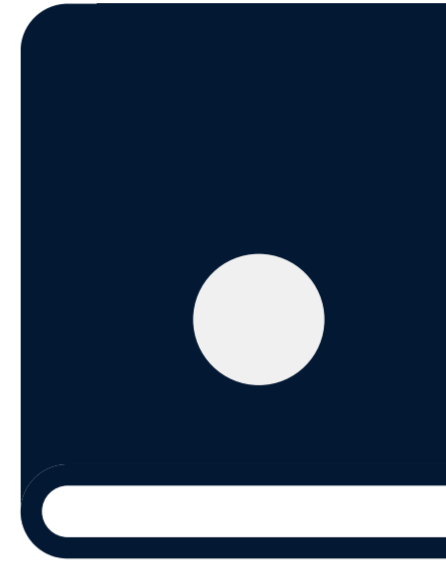
Overcoming Insomnia 2nd Edition

Professor Colin A. Espie



Why We Sleep

Matthew Walker



You Can Sleep Too

Joseph Pannell

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Credits

Numerous people and organisations have helped in the production of this asset and continue to help with the development of our Adult Sleep eBook.

- The Sleep Charity Project Team
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- Design and Production:
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A comfortable and supportive bed is the foundation of a good night's sleep. That's why it made perfect sense for our consumer arm Bed Advice UK to officially support The Sleep Charity's adult sleep eBook. We hope this free resource will equip the nation with practical tools to help them sleep better, in turn benefitting their overall health and wellbeing."

SIMON WILLIAMS,
Head of Marketing and Membership,
National Bed Federation



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