

Counting Sheep



**A practical guide to a good nights sleep
promoting positive mental health for teenagers**

Sleep And Mental Health

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Just like food, water and air, our bodies need sleep.

Good sleep is the foundation for positive mental health. Everyone's individual sleep needs vary. Whilst some may only need as little as 5 hours a night, others may need 10 hours or more. In general however, it is recommended that teenagers get around 8½ - 9½ hours a night.

Sleep deprivation and poor mental health can often go hand in hand.

The diagram below illustrates how worries and stress can lead to poor sleep which can lead to further worries and stress, leading to poor sleep and so the cycle continues.

Left unchecked, this cycle can lead to a serious mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression as well as sleep disorders such as Insomnia.

If this sounds like you, you're not alone. It has been reported that 28% of girls and 22% of boys aged between 14-15 years old believe poor sleep effects their school work.



The factors that lead to poor mental health can often be the root cause of poor sleep.

However, lack of sleep can at times be the root cause or at least assist in the development of poor mental health.

It can be tricky to try and solve all the negative aspects in our lives, however we can make steps to improve the quality of our sleep which can in turn help us tackle life's adversities more efficiently.

The Science of Sleep

Research has suggested that sleep deprivation can:

- Affect our ability to concentrate
- Affect our memory
- Limit our ability to process new information and learn
- Lead to depression and/or anxiety
- Effect our behaviour
- Make us more irritable
- Affect our mood and promote mood swings, which may impact on our relationships with others
- Weaken our immune system which could lead to illness and infection
- Increase the risk of accidents
- Reduce our motivation
- Increase the risk of developing a long term sleep disorders such as insomnia, narcoleptic and restless legs syndrome
- Promote weight gain which has it's own health risks
- Increase our blood pressure
- Increases our sugar levels and in turn the risk of developing diabetes
- Increase the risk of developing a heart condition

Lack of sleep can also impair the way the front of our brain works. This area called the Frontal Lobe, is responsible for high functioning tasks such as memory, speech and language, forming our personality and managing our attention. Losing sleep can result in:

- Poor planning
- Becoming disorganised and haphazard
- An inability to prioritise tasks properly
- Focusing on short-term rewards rather than long-term goals
- A decrease in making valued judgments
- An increase in risk taking behaviour

Signs of sleep deprivation are:

- Daytime fatigue, sleepiness and napping
- Yawning throughout the day
- Irritability and moodiness
- Seeking energy from high energy food and drink
- Bags or dark circles under the eyes
- Lack of motivation

If this sounds like you, you're not alone. It has been reported that 28% of girls and 22% of boy aged between 14-15 years old believe poor sleep effects their school work.

My Approach to Sleep Checklist

Here are some questions you can ask yourself regarding the way you approach sleep.

Things I may need to change:



Do I feel that I get enough sleep? **Y N**

The big question is, do you get enough sleep. If you do, that's great!

If you find yourself yawning throughout the day, taking frequent naps, craving sugary foods or energy drinks and generally feeling tired, the chances are you're not.

Keeping a sleep diary will shed light on why you may not be getting enough sleep and point to changes that you need to make to improve it.

Do I see my bedroom for sleep only? **Y N**

Our bedroom should be the place to sleep and only sleep. This will signal to the brain that sleep is the goal when we enter it.

If our bedroom doubles up as an office, TV room or games room, our brains become confused as to the purpose of it being there. Is it to watch a film, play on the play-station or go to sleep? If you are struggle to sleep, ditch all other activities in your bedroom besides reading perhaps which can help you drop off.

Am I suffering from excessive stress? **Y N**

Stress is the number one cause of short-term sleeping difficulties. If excessive stress is a factor that is keeping us awake, we may need to seek support or alter our lifestyle to alleviate those pressures. Following the recommendations in this booklet many help you sleep better which could in-turn help you tackle those things you are finding stressful more successfully.

Breaking the cycle of stress and no sleep can be half the battle.

Do I have a regular sleep and wake time? **Y N**

Our brains work with an internal clock called the Circadian Rhythm or sleep/wake cycle.

Our quality of sleep is improved when this cycle has a regular pattern.

If you feel you are not getting enough sleep try maintaining a regular sleep-wake schedule, even at the weekends.

Keeping a sleep diary for the first few weeks may help you to stick to a schedule. See pages 12-15

Do I watch TV In bed? **Y N**

Watching TV stimulates the brain and prevents it from shutting down. It puts us in the action and encourages us to follow a story. Whilst we know it's not real, hormones in our bodies can react as if it is and keeps us alert. This is the reason why we enjoy watching TV.

Ever had a 'Box Set' hangover when the night before you've said to yourself 'I'll just watch one more episode, than I'll go to sleep', then find it's 2am in the morning. If this sounds like you, banish the TV. It is not good sleeping partner.

Do I use social media in bed? **Y N**

By it's very nature, social media can be compulsive and difficult to switch off from. Research has suggested that the blue light emitting from phones, tables and TVs can fool the brain into thinking it is still daytime.

If you're struggling to switch of from your social media, try downloading an app that restricts your social media intake or better still, remove all screens from your bedroom.

My Lifestyle Checklist

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The following questions reflect on your habits and lifestyle choices.

Things I may need to change:



Do I avoid caffeinated drinks before bedtime? **Y N**

Caffeine found in tea, coffee and energy drinks stimulates the brain. Whilst this may feel beneficial in the morning as it helps us become more alert, at night it can have a disruptive effect on our ability to fall asleep and can lead to insomnia.

If you feel you can't get through the day without your daily intake of caffeine, try to avoid consuming it from noon onwards. Some studies have shown that caffeine can stay in your system over 6 hours after consumption.

Do I smoke? **Y N**

Like caffeine, nicotine found in cigarettes and e-cigarettes is a stimulant which causes our brains to become alert. Smokers are more likely to have disrupted sleep and develop conditions such as insomnia and sleep apnea.

If you are a smoker, for many health reasons, the advice is to stop. However if you can't or won't quit, try to reduce your urge to smoke during the hours leading up to bedtime.

Do I exercise regularly? **Y N**

Regular exercise improves both sleep quality and duration. Allowing our bodies to become physically tired promotes the brain to feel the same.

Exercise is also a great way to release stress. If excessive stress is a factor that is keeping you awake, exercise could be the answer. There has been many studies that suggest a strong link between exercise, good sleep and good mental health.

Do I eat just before bedtime? **Y N**

We're all partial to a late night snack from time to time. However consuming heavy or spicy foods before bed revs up our digestive system at a time when it should be slowing down. Gravity assists your food to work down to your stomach when we eat throughout the day. This doesn't happen so well if we are lying in bed which can lead to indigestion and disrupted sleep.

Try to avoid eating a few hours before sleep if possible.

Do I find I need the toilet through the night? **Y N**

If you find you're getting up regularly throughout the night to go to the toilet, you might need to reduce your liquid intake during the hours before going to bed.

If you do need to go try to navigate your way to the toilet introducing as little light as possible. You don't want to signal to your brain that it is morning and time to wake up.

Do I make my bed in the morning? **Y N**

It might sound a bit weird, but stick with this one. Whilst it might be a bit of pain to take a minute or two out of each morning to make our bed, it signals to us that we are important enough to set ourselves up with something that we will benefit from later. It also starts our day with an orderly and productive habit which can promote other such habits.

Ask the most organised and productive person you know if they make their bed; the chances are they'll say yes.

My Sleep Environment Checklist

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The questions here looks at your sleep environment and whether it promotes good sleep.

Things I may need to change:



Is my bed comfortable? **Y N**

If you find yourself tossing and turning through the night struggling to get comfortable, it might be a sign that you need a new mattress.

A mattress last between 7 - 10 years depending on the quality and should be flipped and turned every 3 months to ensure even wear. Washing bedding regularly keeps bacteria, fungal spores, dust and dust mites at bay. Besides who doesn't like getting into a bed with freshly washed bedding.

Is my room quiet? **Y N**

It goes without saying, noise can have a dramatic effect on our quality of sleep.

This can be problematic if you share your sleeping space with a sibling. If you find their sleeping habits disrupts your own sleeping needs, try to establish with your parents/guardians some bedtime ground rules you can all agree on. Be sure to point out the health benefits to yourself and the other people involved.

Is my bedroom too bright? **Y N**

Darkness signals to the brain that it is night-time and prepares it to shut down for sleep. Trying to sleep in a light room can be problematic. This is especially so during the summer months.

If possible, have a blackout blind or heavy curtains in your bedroom to eliminate as much light as possible. If not possible, think about buying an eye mask. You can pick one up for a few pounds and they work just as well.

Is my bedroom too hot or cold? **Y N**

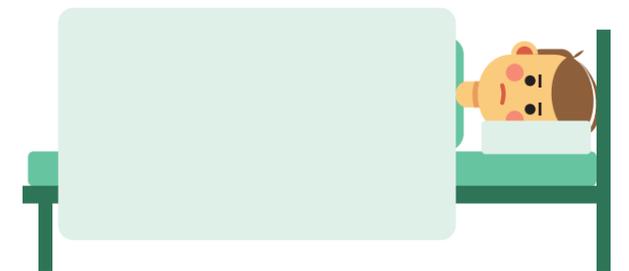
The optimum room temperature for a good nights sleep is between 15 - 19 degrees centigrade. Our bodies temperature decreases as we fall asleep which assists the sleeping process. Feeling too hot or cold can disrupt this from happening as quickly.

When it's not too cold, aerate your room by opening a window. Sleeping under a couple of layers can help you regulate your temperature by adding or removing the top layer.

Is my bedroom tidy? **Y N**

Our bedroom is the place that we start and end our day. If our bedroom is cluttered and chaotic, we start and end our day in clutter and chaos.

Keeping your environment tidy and in order can make the brain feel more relaxed and settled for sleep. It will save you time as you will not need to find things and you won't have your parents on your back telling you to tidy it.



What to do next?

Making changes

The checklist on the previous pages are there to help you establish where you might need to make positive changes to your sleep hygiene.

Whilst some changes maybe simple, free and can be achieved yourself, others may need the support of a parent/guardian. Your are unlikely to be able to arrange the purchase of a new mattress without the financial backing of you parents, but you can keep your bedroom clutter free by yourself or limit your caffeine intake.

Seeking help

If you are struggling to sleep because you have concerns, worries or feeling depressed, it is important that you get support to prevent those feeling from escalating.

Family and friends are often the first port of call when seeking emotional support, however this may not be appropriate in all cases especially if your concerns involve your family or friends.

Most schools have a dedicated team of staff that are there to support the welfare of the pupils. You should be able to find support at your school where they will advise you on the best course of action.

If you have exhausted all these avenues or feel you don't want to talk to family, friends or your school, you can always speak to your doctor.

Providing you have been registered with a doctor by your parents, you can make an appointment and see them by yourself.

Anything that you discuss with your doctor will be private.

The only time the your doctor or health worker might want to talk to someone else about what you have discussed with them, is if they are worried about you or someone else's safety.

Keeping a sleep diary

If you're struggling to sleep perhaps a sleep diary is the way to go.

Keeping a sleep diary can help us gain a clearer understanding of our sleep patterns and identify areas for improvements.

A sleep diary is a daily log to record your sleep-wake pattern. It aims to measure the pattern and quality of your sleep, and factors that may affect it.

Whilst it may be a bit of a pain at first, the benefits of keeping a sleep diary could have a dramatic positive impact on your general well-being.

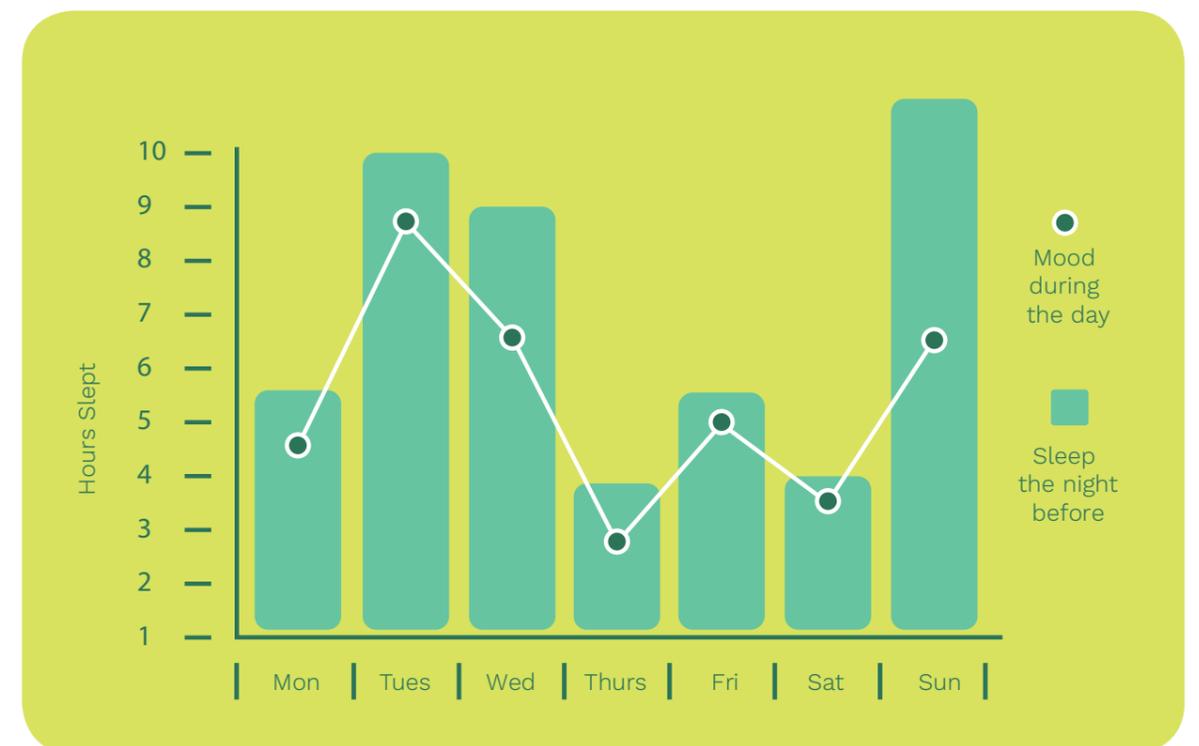
It is recommended that a sleep diary is kept for a period of two weeks in order to gain a clear understanding of the things that affect your sleep.

Ideally the amount of sleep you get each night should be fairly consistant. If it looks like the diagram below, you may find your mood following a similar pattern with lots of ups and downs.

Making changes to our lifestyle choices can be quite tricky. Trying to change everything all at once can often feel overwhelming and lead to frustration. Start with the easiest change first, say keeping your bedroom tidy. Once you have that under your belt, introduce another change.

If you find you have let things slip and fallen on bad habits again, don't worry. These things can often take a couple of attempts to get right.

You may find returning to a sleep diary might help.



Sleep Diary Week 1



Morning

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
The time I went to bed							
The time I woke in the morning							
Approx time it took me to fall asleep							
I fell asleep: With ease After some time With difficulty							
Number of times I awoken through the night							
Total time I was asleep							
What disturbed my sleep							
Quality of sleep 1-10 1 being poor 10 being good							
How do I feel today: 1. Refreshed 2. OK 3. Tired							

Evening

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Caffeinated drinks I have had today before 5pm							
Caffeinated drinks I have had today after 5pm							
Have I consumed any alcohol today							
Minutes of exercise I have done today							
Did I nap at any time and for how long							
Today I have felt: Grumpy Impatient Tired Moody Unable to concentrate							
What did my bedtime routine include							

Sleep Diary Week 2



Morning

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
The time I went to bed							
The time I woke in the morning							
Approx time it took me to fall asleep							
I fell asleep: With ease After some time With difficulty							
Number of times I awoken through the night							
Total time I was asleep							
What disturbed my sleep							
Quality of sleep 1-10 1 being poor 10 being good							
How do I feel today: 1. Refreshed 2. OK 3. Tired							

Evening

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Caffeinated drinks I have had today before 5pm							
Caffeinated drinks I have had today after 5pm							
Have I consumed any alcohol today							
Minutes of exercise I have done today							
Did I nap at any time and for how long							
Today I have felt: Grumpy Impatient Tired Moody Unable to concentrate							
What did my bedtime routine include							

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The notion that counting imaginary sheep jumping over a gate will help us fall asleep faster has been embedded in folk-law for generations.

The theory is that by occupying our minds with something repetitive and mundane induces boredom and promotes the onset of sleep. In doing so we also distract from our minds those things that may be troubling us.

Other sleep inducing methods are as follows:

Hide your clock

There's nothing worse than watching the minutes go by when you're struggling to sleep. If you wake in the night, don't look your clock.

Take a warm shower

Taking a warm shower an hour before going to bed then stepping out into some cooler air will help our body temperature drop quickly promoting the onset of sleep.

Scent your room with Lavender

Oil of Lavender is said to relax our nerves, lower our blood pressure and put us into a relaxed state.

4-7-8 Breathing Method

This breathing method is said to increase the amount of oxygen in your blood stream, slow down your heart rate, releasing more carbon dioxide from the lungs .

- Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
- Repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Get up

If you've woken up and finding it hard to get back off to sleep, get up for 10-15 minutes and do a mundane activity that requires your hands and mind (This doesn't include using your phone). This will prevent the brain from associating lying in bed with being awake.

Write down your thoughts

Our sleep is often disrupted during times when we feel anxious and worried. Thoughts appear to be on a continuous loop that goes round and round our heads into the small hours of the morning.

If you find yourself in this situation, get your thoughts out of you head and onto paper. This process effectively, puts your thoughts to bed.

Scientific research has also suggested that spending 5 minutes each night writing a to-do list of the things we need to do the following day can assist in the transition from wakefulness to sleep.

Try wearing socks in bed

Warming hands and feet before going to bed helps dilate the blood vessels and allows for better blood circulation.

Good blood circulation aids the redistribute heat throughout our bodies, regulating our body temperature and preparing us for sleep.

Research has suggested that wearing socks in bed can reduce the time it takes to get to sleep by 15 minutes.

About Unravel

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