

**Sleep Well**  
Your pocket guide  
to better sleep

Telephone  
020 7803 1100

Email  
[info@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:info@mentalhealth.org.uk)  
Website  
[www.HowDidYouSleep.org](http://www.HowDidYouSleep.org)

Registered charity No.  
England 801130  
Scotland SC039714





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The Mental Health Foundation is a UK-wide charity that carries out research, campaigns for better mental health services, and works to raise awareness of all mental health issues to help us all lead mentally healthier lives. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

This guide has been produced with the assistance of Professor Colin Espie, Director of the University of Glasgow Sleep Centre and co-founder of Sleepio, a new organisation dedicated to helping people sleep better. [www.sleepio.com](http://www.sleepio.com)



Dr Andrew  
McCulloch

## An introduction by Dr Andrew McCulloch, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation:

**Sleep:** like eating, drinking and breathing, it's something that everyone does and something that many people take for granted. However, like all these activities, it is also essential to our physical and mental health.

Getting a good night's sleep allows our bodies and minds to rest, repair and re-energise. Not sleeping well can cause a range of problems, including poor concentration, low mood, irritability, and a weakened immune system. In the longer term, trouble sleeping can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, stress and depression.

As part of our work to help the nation lead mentally healthier lives, we have produced this handy guide to help you improve the quality of your sleep. It is pocket-sized so you can keep it on your bedside table for everyday reference, and take with you when you spend nights away from home.

Whether you are having serious problems sleeping, have occasional nights with poor sleep or are just looking for advice on how you can improve your general sleep quality, there is bound to be some advice that is relevant to you.

So give it a read - we spend a third of our lives asleep, so the outcome could be literally life-changing! Good luck and sleep well.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew McCulloch". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Dr Andrew McCulloch  
Chief Executive,  
Mental Health Foundation

# Sleep Fact 01

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**The Beatles song 'Yesterday' came to Paul McCartney in a dream. It was only when no one he spoke to recognised the tune that he realised he had written it himself.**

## HEAL

The four pillars of good sleep

There are four main factors  
that affect the quality of your sleep:

Health

Environment

Attitude

Lifestyle

**Good sleep doesn't just mean lots of sleep - the amount that each person needs is different. The important thing is that you get good quality sleep. The following advice can help to HEAL your sleep problems:**

## **Health**

**As anyone who has tried to get to sleep with a blocked nose or headache knows, physical health problems can stop you from getting a good night's sleep.**

Speaking to your GP or pharmacist about appropriate medication can help with this. Try to avoid taking medication without speaking to a medical professional, as sometimes the medication itself can stop you sleeping properly if it's not right for you.

Mental health problems like anxiety and depression can also affect our sleep. In these cases a combined approach to tackle both the mental health issue and the poor sleep is often the most effective method of treatment. Speak to your GP or mental health worker (if you have one) for advice on this, or have a look at the Attitude and Lifestyle sections for general ways to maintain good mental wellbeing.

## **Environment**

**The bedroom should be somewhere that we associate with sleep. If possible, it is better to watch TV, play computer games and eat in another room. This will allow you to relax with no distractions in your bedroom.**

Although everyone is different and has their own personal preferences, the common factors that can affect our sleep are light, noise and temperature. Too much light or noise can prevent you from falling asleep or staying asleep. Therefore, if you have sources of light and noise that you can't control, such as from a street lamp or neighbour's music, you might want to use an eye mask or ear plugs.

The temperature of the room is also important. A heater or thicker duvet can help if you regularly find yourself too cold at night; a thinner cover or opening a window can help if you're too hot. If you are struggling to work out the best sleep environment for you then it can be useful keep a sleep diary (there's one in the back of this guide) to keep track of the conditions that helped you get a good night's sleep.

## Attitude

Lying awake in bed, particularly before an important day, can make us worry. However, this worry then makes it harder for us to get to sleep.

Progressive relaxation techniques can help you to relax and unwind at these times – a free audio guide to progressive relaxation can be downloaded from the Mental Health Foundation's sleep website: [www.HowDidYouSleep.org](http://www.HowDidYouSleep.org). Alternatively, instead of staying in bed and getting more and more frustrated, you could get up and make yourself a warm milky drink, and just go back to bed when you feel sleepier.

If you continue to have sleep problems for more than a month, you could speak with your GP about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is used to treat some mental health issues. It can encourage a more positive attitude which can then help to break the cycle of negative thoughts causing your lack of sleep, and helping you develop a healthier sleep pattern.

Alternatively, practices like mindfulness (a type of meditation) can help by reducing stress and anxiety levels. Mindfulness can be practiced without GP prescription – further information can be found at the Mental Health Foundation's dedicated mindfulness website: [www.bemindful.co.uk](http://www.bemindful.co.uk)

## Lifestyle

There are a number of things that you can do every day to improve the quality of your sleep. You shouldn't eat a large meal before going to bed, as you spend a lot of time digesting food before you can sleep.

Eating rice, oats and dairy products can produce chemicals that increase our desire to sleep. However, food and drink containing lots of caffeine or sugar can keep you awake, so drinking less tea and coffee and eating less chocolate and other sugary foods late in the day might help you sleep better. Although it can make you feel tired and help you get to sleep, alcohol often impairs the quality of your sleep and makes you more likely to wake up during the night, as the effects wear off, to go to the toilet or get a drink of water.

Exercising on a regular basis is thought to help us sleep as, amongst other things, it can help to reduce anxiety and relieve stress. It is important to exercise at the right time though. Exercising earlier in the day is better, as exercise increases the body's adrenaline production, making it more difficult to sleep if done just before bedtime.

# Sleep Fact 02

**Driver sleepiness is the cause of around 20% of accidents on long journeys.**

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# Sleep Disorders: The problems they cause and possible solutions

Below is a table of some of the most common sleep-problems, with techniques that can be used to treat them:

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## Disorder      What is it?

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**Insomnia**      Insomnia is the name given to the condition where you are regularly unable to fall asleep or remain asleep for a long enough period of time. As a result, insomnia can have a negative impact on your mood, energy levels, concentration, relationships, ability to stay awake throughout the day, and ability to complete simple daily tasks.

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**Sleep-walking**      Sleepwalking happens during deep sleep, meaning people can rarely remember doing it. As well as getting out of bed and walking, some people do tasks in their sleep, such as cleaning. Sleepwalking is far more common in children than adults.

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## Possible solutions

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CBT is the best proven treatment for persistent insomnia: for an easy introduction, read 'Overcoming Insomnia and Sleep Problems' by Colin Espie or ask your local GP or sleep clinic for advice on other CBT books or courses. Regular daytime or early evening exercise can also be a great way to combat insomnia as it helps to reduce anxiety and stress, as can practices such as mindfulness.

Using sleep medication (or hypnotics), such as sleeping pills, is common. However, they should generally only be used for a few nights as you can become reliant on them long-term. It is best to seek advice from your GP if your insomnia persists.

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Sleep walking is not dangerous unless you start doing risky activities in your sleep. It is often related to stress or lack of sleep, or (in adults) drinking alcohol, so it is important to try and get regular, good quality sleep by looking at the HEAL factors mentioned earlier in this guide.

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## Disorder

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## What is it?

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### Night Terrors

A night terror is different to a nightmare in that it occurs during deep sleep, meaning you rarely remember it. Often an extreme and frightening experience, night terrors make your heart beat faster and might cause you to sweat or scream. Night terrors often begin in childhood, but rarely continue into adulthood.

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### Snoring

Snoring is a very common problem, affecting 37% of adults in the UK. Snoring is a breathing problem, rather than a sleep problem, and happens when a blockage in the airway causes the organs that help us to breathe to vibrate. It is usually more of a problem for anyone who shares a room with a snorer, rather than for the snorer themselves.

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### Sleep Apnoea

Sleep apnoea causes shallow breathing or pauses in breathing that may last up to 30 seconds at a time. In most cases, you will begin to breathe normally again, often making a loud snort or choking sound to clear your airway. People with sleep apnoea can wake up frequently throughout the night feeling sweaty with a dry mouth and a headache.

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## Possible solutions

Little is known about how to treat people who have regular night terrors, although in some cases, they can be linked to a traumatic experience. If this is the case, and your night terrors are affecting your everyday life or ability to sleep, your GP might be able to refer you for therapy to help you deal with the underlying trauma.

Nasal strips can help by widening the nasal passage and improving the airflow when breathing. It is also better to sleep on your side, as sleeping on your back can cause your tongue to fall backwards and partly block your airflow. Drinking less alcohol, exercising more regularly and taking steps to lose weight (if you are overweight) can also reduce your snoring.

Unlike snoring it is more important to treat sleep apnoea to prevent the brain being deprived of oxygen. A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device can help by easing your airflow. Your GP will be able to recommend where you can get an assessment for a CPAP device.

# Sleep Fact 03

**Pythons sleep for up to 18 hours a day.**

**Giraffes generally sleep for less than two.**

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Professor  
Colin Espie

## Top Tips from the Sleep Doctor Professor Colin Espie, Director of the Glasgow University Sleep Centre and co-founder of Sleepio, offers his five top tips for a great night's sleep.

### 01 Don't get caught napping!

If you have trouble sleeping you may feel tempted to catch up on sleep by taking naps. However, unless you're feeling dangerously sleepy (whilst driving or operating machinery for instance) this usually does more harm than good as it makes it more difficult to sleep at night. If you feel tired during the day, get up and take a walk around, get some fresh air, or do something challenging for a short while like a crossword or Sudoku.

### 02 If you're not tired, get up.

If you're finding it difficult to get to sleep, don't just lie there worrying. Get up for a few minutes and get a drink (no sugar or caffeine remember!) and go back to bed when you're feeling a bit sleepier.

### 03 Set yourself a 'Get Fit' plan.

Eating healthily and getting regular exercise are great ways of helping yourself sleep better. However, plan your meals and exercise to avoid exercising or eating a big meal after mid-evening: doing either too close to your bed time can stop you sleeping.

### 04 Don't stress it!

Thinking about sleep too much or trying to force yourself to sleep will only keep you awake. Learning how to relax both your body and mind instead will help you to get to sleep much more easily. I have provided a free audio MP3 of relaxation techniques on the Mental Health Foundation's sleep website ([www.HowDidYouSleep.org](http://www.HowDidYouSleep.org)) which may help you with this.

### 05 Keep a sleep diary.

The amount of noise, light, distractions, what and when we eat, and the temperature of our bedroom can all affect how well we sleep. Keeping a sleep diary to make a note of what the conditions were when you went to bed the night before can be useful to let you to look back and see what has worked and what hasn't worked for you. It also helps you see how your sleep varies from night to night.

# Sleep Fact 04

**The world's loudest snore is 111.6 decibels – that's as loud as a jet plane!**

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## Further Information

### The 'How Did You Sleep' website

The official website of the Mental Health Foundation's year-long campaign to help the nation sleep better. Our full Sleep Matters report, a copy of this pocket guide, an audio MP3 on relaxation techniques that can help you get to sleep are all available to download or order here. Details of other information and activities related to the campaign will also be posted throughout the year – sign up to receive regular email alerts.

Website: [HowDidYouSleep.org](http://HowDidYouSleep.org)

### Mental Health Foundation

Visit the Mental Health Foundation website to download the full Sleep Matters report and a range of other booklets and webpages that can help you live a mentally healthier life.

Website: [mentalhealth.org.uk](http://mentalhealth.org.uk)  
Email: [info@mhf.org.uk](mailto:info@mhf.org.uk)

### Sleepio

Sleepio is a new organisation dedicated to helping people sleep better, co-founded by Professor Colin Espie, Director of the University of Glasgow Sleep Centre and the 'Top Tips' Sleep Doctor in this guide. The Sleepio website includes info about various sleep problems and your chance to take part in the Great British Sleep Survey!

Website: [sleepio.com](http://sleepio.com)  
Email: [hello@sleepio.com](mailto:hello@sleepio.com)

### Your local GP

If you continue to be concerned about the amount and quality of sleep you are having and the affects it is having on other aspects of your life, your GP may be able to help.

### British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association

The British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to helping snorers and their bed partners improve their sleep.

Website: [britishsnoring.co.uk](http://britishsnoring.co.uk)  
Email: [info@britishsnoring.co.uk](mailto:info@britishsnoring.co.uk)  
Telephone: 01737 245638

### Be Mindful

Be Mindful is a campaign by the Mental Health Foundation to make courses in mindfulness meditation available to everyone who wants or needs them. This site provides useful information on what mindfulness is and the different mindfulness-based courses available. You can also search for mindfulness courses near you or sign up for the Mental Health Foundation's specially-developed online course.

Email: [mindfulness@mhf.org.uk](mailto:mindfulness@mhf.org.uk)  
Website: [bemindful.co.uk](http://bemindful.co.uk)  
Telephone: 020 7803 1100

### 'Overcoming Insomnia and Sleep Problems', by Professor Colin Espie

Professor Colin Espie's self-help manual, 'Overcoming Insomnia and Sleep Problems', presents the proven principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in a clear step-by-step approach which allows you to quickly learn new patterns of relaxation, sleeping and waking.

Order online at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) by searching 1845290704

### British Sleep Society

The British Sleep Society is a charity for medical, scientific and healthcare workers dealing with sleep disorders in the UK.

Website: [sleeping.org.uk](http://sleeping.org.uk)  
Email: [enquiries@sleeping.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sleeping.org.uk)

## Sleep Diary

**Working out the reasons why you might have problems sleeping can be difficult. Keeping a sleep diary, like the one on the next page, can help you keep track of when you slept well or poorly and the possible reasons why that happened.**

To complete the sleep diary, simply read the questions opposite and answer them in the appropriate space in the table. For instance, the answer to question A will be put in column A of the table next to the date of the sleep concerned. An example is provided on the first line of the table.

**Remember, this diary is your personal record of how well you slept and why, so be honest!**

This sleep diary has enough space for up to a week. Once you have completed it, you can download and print a new copy from our website: [www.HowDidYouSleep.org](http://www.HowDidYouSleep.org).

### Questions for sleep diary

- A How did you sleep last night?
- B What time did you go to bed?
- C Approximately how long did it take you to get to sleep?
- D How many times did you wake up during the night?
- E What time did you wake up?
- F How long did you sleep for in total?
- G What did you consume (if anything) within four hours of going to bed (e.g. cup of tea/coffee/ milky drink, glass of wine/beer, sleeping pills, dinner) and how long before bed did you consume it?
- H What was the temperature outside and in your bedroom?
- I What light sources were there when you went to sleep?
- J How much noise was there when you went to sleep?
- K What activities did you undertake before you went to sleep?
- L Any other comments?
- M How well did you feel throughout the next day (1= awful, 5= average, 10= perfect)? Include a description if appropriate (e.g. drowsy, grumpy, spaced out)?

