



SUPPORTING THE HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING OF THE ARMED  
FORCES COMMUNITY AND  
CIVILIAN FAMILIES IN  
CORNWALL



## **GOOD SLEEPING HYGIENE**



In order to sustain our body energy and awareness, our bodies are biologically programmed to sleep, normally at night, to fit in with societies' norms and the world's planetary rhythms. Within these rhythms, people have different biological clocks, some sleep early and rise early, whereas others prefer to go to bed late and rise late. Whatever our needs, we need a few good hours, normally between 6-8 hrs, of light, deep and REM sleep each night, or sometimes during the day, if we are on night shift.

There are a range of behaviours that can interfere with our regular sleep pattern: stress, alcohol, pain, eating too late, sleep apnoea (cessation of breathing periodically), overstimulation from watching TV or working on a laptop late at night, too much caffeine, exercising too late, jetlag, anxiety and shift work.

Here are some things to consider in order to keep good sleep hygiene -

1. If you start to worry when trying to sleep, set yourself a time during which you give yourself permission to worry, say, between 6.30 and 7.00 am. List your worries in writing and shut them in in a draw not to be looked at until next day. This can convince the mind that it does not have to worry in the meantime, assisting the whole body to relax and sleep.
2. Meditate before going to bed – focussing on the breath or completing the body scan can clear the mind of thinking, clearing the mind of worry.
3. Even when unable to sleep, try not to worry. If the body is lying still, it is resting. Whilst lying on your back, you could try the body scan.
4. If you are unable to sleep, try reading a few pages, and then lying still. However, if unable to sleep still, read a few more pages and then resume the sleeping position.

5. The body has a way of coping, so if you are unable to sleep, the body will catch up again, maybe the next day will not be so bad. If you cannot sleep, try doing some work on a project or doing something which will focus your mind. Take the time to be aware of being awake. Many people float through life unaware that they are actually alive!
6. Regular exercise, such as swimming, yoga, running, can enhance your sleeping quality, no matter what age or ability.
7. If you wake up tired in the morning, consider going to bed earlier.
8. Avoid drinking tea or coffee late in the evening.
9. Consider having a good breakfast and lunch and a small dinner, before 6 pm. This gives the body an opportunity to focus blood supply to the rest of the body for healing, instead of digesting. Once in a while, consider having your end-of -day meal before 6 pm and then your next meal at lunchtime the following day; this gives the body a long window in which to focus blood supply to the rest of the body. (fasting)
10. A few alcoholic beverages will probably get you off to sleep but once the alcohol has been broken down, your body may experience withdrawal and wake you up.
11. Do exercise early in the day and certainly not within two hrs of sleeping. Let your metabolism rest and the endorphins settle before sleep.
12. A milky drink or camomile tea before bedtime can help.
13. Consider having a relaxing, warm, bath or shower before going to bed.
14. Make sure that the mattress and pillow you sleep on is right for you, that is, good for your back; not old and too soft.
15. When it is dark, our bodies respond biologically to sleep, so use blackout curtains or blinds or an eye mask, if necessary.
16. The bedroom should be used for sleep and not for watching TV or listening to loud music; sex is good for releasing tension and promoting post coital relaxation and sleep.
17. If possible, leave your mobile out of the bedroom (especially for children), but definitely out of reach.
18. Try thinking about one creative project only just after getting into bed..... leave the mind free to create and consider options but no pressure to decide..... and see what happens.
19. Earplugs can shut out any unwanted noise like snoring. A consideration here is that it will possibly also shut out any noise associated with an emergency, so caution is advised.
20. You should ensure that you have the appropriate amount of bed covers so as not to be too hot or cold.
21. Spraying some lavender around the bed or on the pillow can help induce sleep.
22. Try not to nap at lunchtime or in the afternoon as this could erode your sleep later on.
23. Try visualising a place you associate with calm and beauty, as you move into this space, leaving your cares and worries behind can enhance sleep.

24. Sleeping at night is a conditioned behaviour.... think how we train infants to sleep through the night. So, if you reward the brain when it wakes up during the night by watching a film or cooking food, it will continue to keep you awake. However, if you deprive the brain of reward, by doing boring repetitive tasks like polishing or ironing, and only go back to bed when physically tired, your brain will learn that being asleep is the better option.
25. If your sleep is interrupted by worry about, finances, relationships, health etc. log on to **authentichappiness.org website** and have a look at the **‘Wellbeing Wheel’**. Choose two of the life areas under the PERMAH wheel to improve. By developing, a prompt, a routine and a reward, the routine will eventually become a habit of wellbeing. In this way, you can look at your life as a whole to see where you need to focus to grow and evolve. This will diminish worry and aid sleep.
26. People often talk about ‘going **to** sleep’ but we don’t go **to** a place, instead sleep comes to us. Our sleep can also be seen in contrast to how awake we are during the day. Perhaps being less concerned about our lack of sleep, and more mindful of how we spend our moments during the day we can learn more about our bodies’ sleep requirements by listening to our bodies’ needs in general.

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