

# Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Services

# Sleeping Problems



Coventry City Council

**SEQOHS**

Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service



Faculty of Occupational Medicine  
of the Royal College of Physicians



[www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw)

## Introduction

Life in this modern age is hectic and can lead to stress, which in turn can cause loss of sleep. This leaflet describes the various aspects of sleep and insomnia and ways in which problems with sleep can be overcome.

## Sleep

### Physiologically

The heart and lungs rest, muscles relax and the body's metabolic rate is reduced. The biological inner clock is individual and fits into two main categories: People who function better in the morning and those who function better at night.

## Four Stages of Sleep

### Stage 1

This is the lightest phase, shifting from wakefulness to drowsiness.

### Stage 2

This begins quite soon after falling asleep and any external noise will usually not be disturbing. This stage takes up 45% of our sleep and merges with Stage 3.

### Stage 3

On the way to a deeper sleep, heart rate slows and we breathe more slowly.

### Stage 4

The deepest sleep which we stay in for quite long periods. It is during this stage when we dream and have Rapid Eye Movement.

## Variation In Our Sleep Needs

The sleep requirements of individuals can vary. Some people can function on three or four hours sleep, whilst others need eight hours or more a night.

# Insomnia

It is defined as difficulty in getting to sleep or maintaining adequate sleep over a period of at least three weeks.

## Three Types Of Insomnia

- 1 Difficulty in getting off to sleep and, therefore, tossing and turning.
- 2 Intermittent Sleep – this is when we wake up on and off during the night and, therefore, don't experience a proper restful sleep.
- 3 Early Morning Wakening – a pattern of early wakening and being unable to get to sleep again.

## How do I know if I am suffering from insomnia?

Everyone needs a certain amount of sleep but how much, is down to the individual. If you feel constantly tired and fatigue is affecting your mood and functioning during the day, then that is an indication of a problem.

Doctors do not consider insomnia a medical condition in its own right, rather a possible symptom and classify it into three groups.

- Transient Insomnia is sleepiness, which endures for a few days
- Chronic Insomnia lasts longer term with no obvious causes but can be a symptom of chronic anxiety
- Affective Disorders such as Schizophrenia, Bi-Polar Disorder, Clinical Depression, usually have disturbed sleep patterns and are treated with medication

Life events such as relationship breakdown, bereavement, and other life changes, can disturb sleep patterns. As can work overload, burn-out and physical health problems.

# Overcoming Insomnia

- Establish a pattern of winding down so that over-stimulation of the mind is limited
- Try to go to bed at a similar time
- Make the bedroom a more tranquil place and move work type items – such as computers to other parts of the house
- If you are still awake after 40 minutes it is better to get up out of bed and read or watch TV until you feel drowsy
- Having a nap during the day or evening generally should be avoided as this can disrupt a good sleep pattern
- Take more exercise during the day
- Deal with the underlying causes of insomnia such as stress and anxiety related to problems
- Avoid caffeinated drinks late at night and heavy meals
- Alcohol should not be used regularly to get to sleep because that can lead to other problems
- Don't have too hot a bath before bed as it may increase the heart rate and agitate the mind
- Listen to a relaxation tape and do relaxation exercises, which relax the muscles
- Sleeping pills do have a part to play in the treatment of insomnia but usually after other methods have been tried. Your GP will advise on the appropriateness of this, as each person is an individual
- If problems of sleeplessness continue for some time it would be advisable to consult your GP

## Further information:

Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service  
Thomas Yeoman House, Canal Basin,  
Coventry CV1 4LY

**Tel:** 024 7683 3285

**Website:** [www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw)

**email:** [ohsw@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:ohsw@coventry.gov.uk)



**Occupational Health,  
Safety and Wellbeing**  
Delivering quality services