



ANXIETY AND SLEEP

- ✓ **Do not try too hard to sleep**
- ✓ **Let sleep come to you when the timing is right**
- ✓ **Keep a regular daily routine, regular times for eating, sleeping and doing other things**
- ✓ **Learn some methods to relax**
- ✓ **Part of the reason why you don't sleep may be that you worry about sleep too much**
- ✓ **Do not lie in bed awake for a long time. If after 20 minutes, you are still awake, get up and go and sit in a quiet, dark room somewhere, not doing anything, until you feel sleepy again**
- ✓ **Seeping tablets are not as helpful as you might think**

Feeling anxious about sleep?

It is important to understand that waking up at night is normal. Some people remember waking up and may worry about it. Others do not remember waking up. Worrying about sleep usually makes the sleep worse. Do not think "I won't be able to function tomorrow unless I get back to sleep". Instead try: "I've been able to function on less sleep before and I will get by OK again tomorrow". Relaxation exercises before going to bed may help. If sleep anxiety continues, a doctor should be consulted. A referral to a specialist sleep psychologist may also be needed.

I've never slept well but don't think I have anxiety

Whether you do or don't have a relatively stress-free life, anxiety for an overactive mind can get in the way of a good night's sleep. It is true that some people do not sleep well due to stress in their lives. But others have mostly stress-free lives, except that they worry about their sleep. By itself, this can disrupt the quality of sleep. Being fit and having a healthy diet can also play a part in how well you sleep.

Caffeine and Alcohol?

It is important to only have caffeine and alcohol in moderation. This will result in better sleep quality. Caffeine should be avoided for at least 3 to 7 hours before going to bed. Using alcohol to relax and de-stress before going to bed will not help your sleep. It may help to get you off to sleep, but will interrupt your sleep during the night. Too much caffeine will make you too alert to sleep well.

Sleep or anti-anxiety medication?

Medicines (e.g. sleeping tablets or anti-anxiety drugs) will not always work. Their effectiveness decreases with time and they can be habit forming. The best way to lower anxiety about sleep is to try to alter how you think about sleep. There are many methods to learn new ways to think about your sleep, or lack of it. These include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness. These have been proven to be effective. Ask your sleep specialist physician about CBT.

I don't know who to talk to. What should I do?

Talk to your GP, they can help you or refer you to a sleep specialist that can help. There are psychologists who are trained to help people sleep better. They can explain to you about the mental factors involved.