

The first thing to do is to ensure you **support your “Sleep Makers”**. There is more detail here, and more definite rules than we described in [Sleep Well](#)

Next we need to have good strategies to **deal with the stress** of not sleeping. Lastly we’ll cover some other things that may help.

**Read through all this information, decide what changes you are going to make, and then stick to your plan for 2 weeks. The more helpful changes you can make at once the better. A written down plan, and someone to support you can help.**

There is a plan-recording sheet you can use [here](#)

### A note about Medical Problems

If you are having trouble with pain, your bladder, flushes, snoring, or your breathing, or any physical symptoms that are waking you, then your doctor should be concerned they are disturbing your sleep and will help you find out what is going on, and what can be done to solve these difficulties. Sometimes prescription drugs can interfere with sleep. You could check the drug information leaflet for this. A small number of us will have a ‘sleep disorder’ which needs specialist help.

Whatever else is going on, the ideas described here are very likely to help you either get good enough sleep again, or support you while waiting to see someone about these difficulties.

### Fully Supporting your three “Sleep Makers”

#### Starting in the morning ....

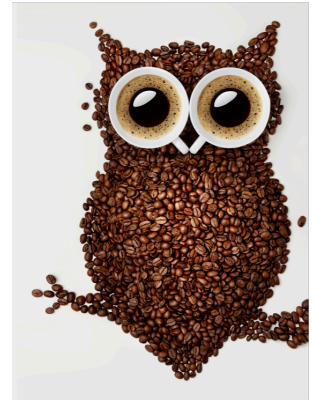
- ★ Get up at the **same time every** day, even if you’ve had a bad night.
- ★ Get out into bright natural daylight or bright artificial full spectrum light for about half an hour as early in the day as possible, certainly before noon. In the UK especially in winter it **may** help to use a full spectrum lamp such as a SAD lamp either at your work-place if you work at a desk, or before going out. You could try the free natural light first to check the effect before you spend money on a lamp.

#### ... around the middle of the day ...

- ★ Reduce your caffeine intake and have your last caffeinated drink (coffee, tea, coke) before midday. Some people are more sensitive to caffeine than others, so you may need to cut it out altogether.
- ★ **Don’t sleep again during the day**, no matter how tired you feel, unless this is for safety (driving etc)
- ★ Do any vigorous activities or aerobic exercise, as early as possible, 3 hours before bedtime at the latest.

#### ... and evenings

- ★ **Make your evening meal a light meal** and eat it **as early as possible**. This is a good time to have a light whole-food plant-based meal. Avoid fatty, rich foods and refined flour and sugar. If you wake with a full bladder at night, perhaps now is the time to have your last drink too.
- ★ **Let it get dark(er) in the evening**. Turn off bright lights, particularly daylight full-spectrum lights. Your internal clock will be confused if it senses ‘daylight’ in the evening. Computer and phone screens are usually set to daylight light. Many phones and computers have an option to switch to a ‘night shift’ or other evening mode. f.lux is a free programme for computers. **TVs can’t be adjusted in this way**.
- ★ **Stop using screens**, smart phones, and watching TV at least an hour before bed, and preferably sooner. This is to avoid ‘stimulating’ your brain too much. Obviously if you watch something calm and relaxing that will be different. Chilled/relaxing music, or reading can be really good for this time.
- ★ **Ensure you are as relaxed as possible** by bedtime. This is a really good time to practice a relaxing [breathing for 10 - 20 minutes](#), or do a really good **stretching** routine such as yoga. A hot bath or shower isn’t just relaxing: the **cooling** down when you get out helps you sleep.
- ★ Go to bed at a time that allows enough **sleep opportunity** - **usually 8 hours** - before your waking time.



## Habits, Routines and Rituals

Having a **regular bedtime routine** will mean that you begin to unconsciously EXPECT sleep. If you've been having trouble sleeping, then creating **new** routines can help break the an expectation of NOT sleeping.

**Do everything you can to make the bedroom a calm, comfortable and restful place.**

Get rid of anything distracting, particularly a TV, and reminders of work, or stresses. Pay some attention to your pillows mattress and bedding - they may need sorting. Put your phone away somewhere else for the night well before bed and/or put it on airplane mode, unless somebody's safety depends on having it nearby.

## Getting off to sleep

Many of the things that cause trouble getting to sleep at the start of the night can be sorted out by doing everything on the "Support your Sleep Makers" list. Once this is done, (unless there is another physical reason like pain, noise or being too hot or cold) then the main problem for people getting off to sleep, is either from **trying** to fall asleep, **getting upset** about not being asleep or getting **lost in thoughts**, or a combination of all three. What they all have in common is that you won't be relaxed enough to fall asleep.

There are two main ways of dealing with this.

- 1) **No-one ever fell asleep by trying.** Instead of trying, **focus on relaxing.** You might imagine you'd just laid down on the sofa after lunch or any another situation when you just want to **enjoy resting** without expecting to fall asleep. This is much easier to do when you have learned to relax deliberately. **4:6 breathing will really help, and you can learn about this [here](#).** Counting the breath can occupy your mind. Can you do 60 breaths before falling asleep? Probably not. If you sleep alone and can put on some music, calming speech or sounds to fall asleep to this can also keep your mind from wandering.
- 2) Agree with yourself an amount of time you'll give yourself to fall asleep. It is normal to take up to 20 minutes to get off to sleep. If you are still awake after **20 minutes of relaxing**, then get up and do something incredibly **dull and boring** until you feel tired again. Then go back to bed again. Beware of doing something interesting rather than boring, especially if you use this trick for times of lying awake later in the night - this is not a habit or routine you want to get into!

## Waking Up Again?

People who "sleep through the night" actually wake at least 4 times, but only for an instant, and don't remember it the morning. This is because like all other sensible animals, humans wake regularly through the night just to check things are all OK. We do this at least once after each period of dream sleep. If bedtime is 11pm this will be around 1, 2.30, 4 and 5.30 am. Do these times sound familiar?

If you have pain, a full bladder, are feeling generally stressed, are too hot or too cold, or your partner has started snoring these become the times you may remember waking right up. Waking like this 2 - 3 times at night need not matter; so long as you get back to sleep in a few minutes. You can use the tips given in "Getting off to sleep" if you find yourself lying awake again.

## A few more things to think about ...

### Fags and Booze!

Nicotine withdrawal during the night can disrupt sleep. Alcohol does a similar thing. Alcohol will help you get off to sleep and will even help you get more vital deep sleep in the first 4 hours, but after that it can lead to broken poor quality sleep later in the night. So nicotine and alcohol can both cause problems in the second half of the night. If in doubt, cut the alcohol after supertime, quit smoking when you feel ready.

### Drugs

It may a drug you are taking is interfering with your sleep. It may even be that you are taking these drugs because you are having difficulty sleeping. You could talk this through with a doctor, nurse or other caring professional.