

IN THE SPOTLIGHT THIS MONTH

SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Did you know that sleep deprivation can have profound consequences on your physical health? It's now clear that a solid night's sleep is essential for a long and healthy life.



What happens if I don't sleep?

Everyone's experienced fatigue; short temper and lack of focus that often follow a poor night's sleep.

An occasional night without sleep makes you feel tired and irritable the next day, but it won't harm your health.

After several sleepless nights, the mental effects become more serious. Your brain will fog, making it difficult to concentrate and make decisions. You'll start to feel down, and may fall asleep during the day. Your risk of injury and accidents at home, work and on the road also increases.

Insomnia is

Difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep for long enough to feel refreshed the next morning. It's a common problem thought to regularly affect around one in every three people in the UK, and is particularly common in elderly people.



If you have insomnia, you may:

- find it difficult to fall asleep
- lie awake for long periods at night
- wake up several times during the night
- wake up early in the morning and not be able to get back to sleep
- not feel refreshed when you get up
- find it hard to nap during the day, despite feeling tired
- feel tired and irritable during the day and have difficulty concentrating.

Occasional episodes of insomnia may come and go without causing any serious problems, but for some people it can last for months or even years at a time.

How much sleep do I need?

There are no official guidelines about how much sleep you should get each night, because everyone is different.

On average, a "normal" amount of sleep for an adult is considered to be around seven to nine hours a night. Children and babies may sleep for much longer than this, whereas older adults may sleep for less.



What causes insomnia?

It's not always clear what triggers insomnia, but it's often associated with:

- stress and anxiety
- a poor sleeping environment, such as an uncomfortable bed, or a bedroom that's too light, noisy, hot or cold
- lifestyle factors, such as jet lag, shift work, or drinking alcohol or caffeine before going to bed
- mental health conditions, such as depression and schizophrenia
- physical health conditions, such as heart problems, other sleep disorders and long-term pain
- certain medicines, such as some antidepressants, epilepsy medicines and steroid medication.



Here are some ways in which a good night's sleep can boost your health:

- boosts immunity and mental wellbeing
- studies have suggested missing out on deep sleep may lead to type 2 diabetes by changing the way the body processes glucose
- sleep wards off heart disease
- sleep increases sex drive, and fertility



Sleeping pills and the alternatives



More than 10 million prescriptions for sleeping pills are given each year in England, but medication only offers short-term relief.

Non-drug treatments have been underused, but sleep experts say they offer the best long-term solutions to chronic insomnia.

Before your GP can make a diagnosis, you may be asked to keep a sleep diary, in order to record bedtimes, wake times, hours slept and quality of sleep each morning.

“Sleep diaries are an invaluable insight into the patient’s sleeping habits”.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia/Documents/sleepdiary.pdf>

Driving

The M40 minibus crash was one of the first fatigue-related road accidents to attract national attention. It occurred just after midnight on 18 November 1993. 14 children and the driver (the children’s music teacher) died when the vehicle veered off the motorway and crashed into a maintenance truck parked on the hard shoulder. The jury was told that the incident was a ‘classic case’ of the driver falling asleep at the wheel.

A Brake and Direct Line survey (2010) found that nearly threequarters of drivers (74%) admitted driving tired in the past 12 months, with almost 1 in 10 (10%) saying they did so at least once a week.

The Law

Fatigued drivers can be charged with:

- Careless driving
- Dangerous driving
- Death by dangerous driving (which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment).

A full list of driving penalties is available on page 24 of ‘Driving for Work: Managing Fatigue Risks’ T997, RSSB

DO YOU HAVE SLEEP PROBLEMS?

Are you having trouble sleeping? This short test from Sleepio will give you a ‘sleep score’ plus practical tips and advice for improving your sleep.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Sleep-self-assessment.aspx>
<http://www.nhs.uk/Video/Pages/sleep-problems-podcast.aspx>

Dr Chris Williams explains what you can do to give yourself the best chance of a good night’s sleep. This podcast is one of an eight-part series for Moodzone NHS Choices

DID YOU KNOW

Fatigue can have a similar effect to alcohol on driving performance.

Research has found that after two hours of driving drivers make similar mistakes to someone with 0.05% blood alcohol content. This is more than half the UK legal drink drive limit.



Find out how to tell if you’re too tired to drive.

<http://think.direct.gov.uk/fatigue.html>

THINK! - Don’t drive tired

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSZ_so_4c7U

Warning: contains scenes which some people may find distressing

Studies have shown that people who sleep less than seven hours a day tend to gain more weight and have a higher risk of becoming obese than those who get seven hours of slumber

10 MEDICAL REASONS FOR BEING TIRED, if concerned see your GP

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/tiredness-and-fatigue/Pages/medical-causes-of-tiredness.aspx>

Further information can be found at:

1. <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/howsleep-better>
2. <http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk/>

References:

1. T997 Driving for work RSSB,
2. Sleep Deprivation

