



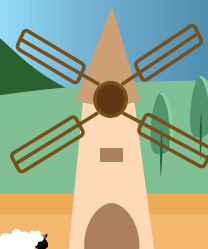
# The Sleep Better Booklet



Live Well  
with Cancer



northern  
cancer  
alliance



Developed by  
Transformational  
Learning



# Welcome to The Sleep Better Booklet!

## What are the benefits of sleep?

We spend around a third of our lives sleeping, and yet many of us only think of it when it goes wrong. Sleep plays a vital role in maintaining our health. During sleep...

- ✓ **Your body repairs cells, tissues and muscles.**
- ✓ **Your brain processes thoughts and emotions.**
- ✓ **Your energy increases for the next day.**
- ✓ **Your immune system is boosted.**
- ✓ **Your mood is balanced.**

Someone sleeping has three main physical signs... closed eyes, lying down, and being quiet. While these suggest sleep is passive, we use more energy when we sleep than we do when we're awake.

You sleep because of the relationship between your body clock and your sleep drive.

## What is the body clock?

Your body clock helps keep your body working in roughly 24-hour cycles. Known as the circadian rhythm, your body clock is actually 24¼ hours. This means you need external cues to keep your bodily systems to 24-hour cycles. The three main external cues are...



## What is the sleep drive?

Your sleep drive is your need for sleep. This is at its lowest when you wake up and reaches its peak at nighttime. Your sleep drive will continue to build until you fall asleep.

All sleep problems are caused by one of three things. There may be a problem with the clock, a problem with the drive, or the two are not working together.

## What makes you sleep?

You sleep because of a balance of hormones.

Imagine sleep is in a box, just waiting to come out. During the day, you have six hormones sitting on top of the box, preventing you from sleeping. Over the course of the day, the pressure builds inside the box until sleep must come out, regardless of the hormones on top.

Another hormone that makes you feel sleepy is **melatonin**. Your levels of melatonin remain low during daylight, but you produce more later in the day, making you sleepy.



## What is the right amount of sleep?

For sleep to be good, it needs to be of the right quantity and quality. Everyone has different sleep needs, which change over the course of life. Children and teenagers need more sleep than adults to help them develop, while older adults might have difficulty getting the right amount of sleep.

The National Sleep Foundation suggests the following ranges...



**Younger Adults**

*6-11 hrs of sleep*



**Adults**

*6-10 hrs of sleep*



**Older Adults (65+)**

*5-9 hrs of sleep*

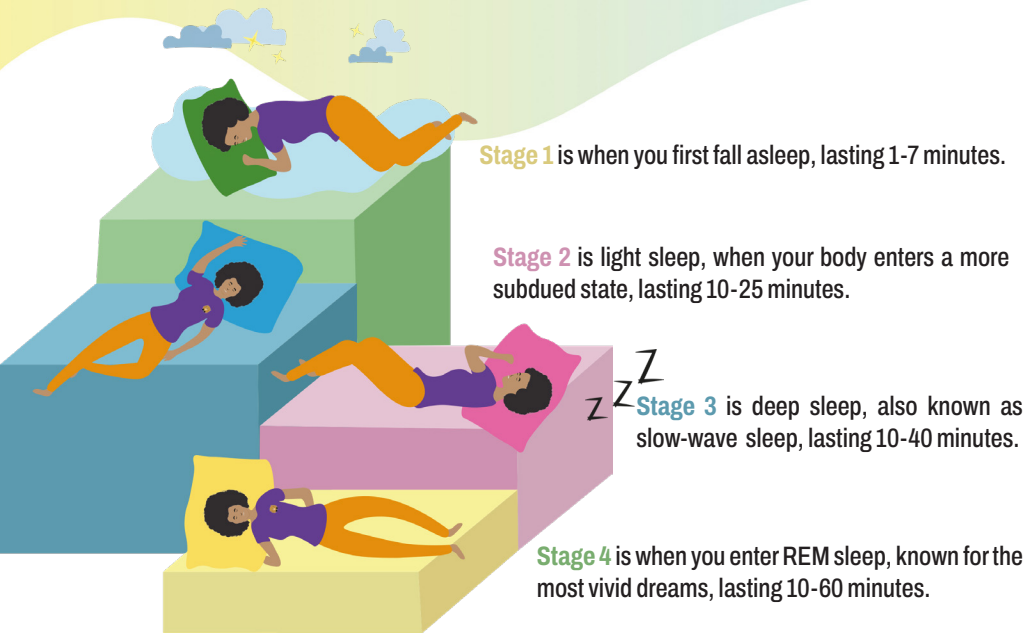
While these ranges offer an idea of the amount of sleep you need, it is important to understand your own sleep needs. Too much or too little sleep over a long period can negatively affect your wellbeing.

The important thing to consider is whether your time spent sleeping has helped to restore you for the day ahead. The best indicator is how you feel between 20 and 40 minutes after waking.

- ✓ If you feel well-rested and restored, then your sleep quality is probably good.
- ✓ If you feel tired or sleepy, there may be an issue with your sleep quality, quantity or timing.

## What is the sleep cycle?

The stages of the sleep cycle can be split into two categories, Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep, and non-REM sleep. Each sleep cycle has four stages, three for non-REM, and one for REM.

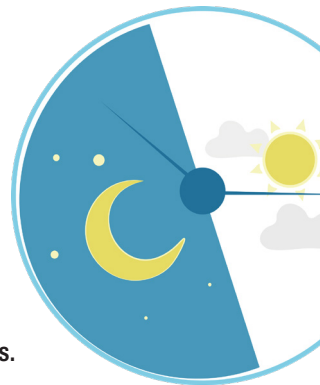


## ‘The higher the stage of sleep you are in, the harder it is to wake you up’

Your total sleep is made up of several rounds of the sleep cycle.

- ✓ In a typical night, a person goes through four to six sleep cycles.
- ✓ The first sleep cycle is often the shortest, ranging from 70-100 minutes.
- ✓ Later cycles tend to be between 90-120 minutes.
- ✓ The amount of time spent in each sleep stage changes as the night goes on.

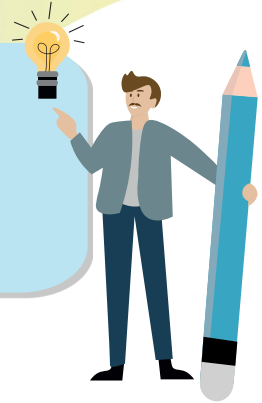
It is important to have undisturbed periods of each sleep stage, especially deep sleep and REM sleep. When your sleep is disrupted, it takes time to get back to sleep, if you can.



## Why is sleep important?

When you sleep well, it happens almost without thought. But when sleep goes wrong, it can take over your life, leaving you feeling frustrated, low and even lonely. At any one time a quarter of the UK population suffers from a sleep disorder that affects their daily lives.

**‘Poor sleep can lead to a sleep debt, which is the gap between how much sleep you need and how much you are getting’**



- ✓ Sleep debt can be paid back over time.
- ✓ Many people keep adding to their sleep debt and have forgotten what good sleep is like.
- ✓ Others try to repay sleep debt at the weekend, but this can cause problems with your sleep drive and body clock.

## Why do people develop sleeping problems?

The reasons you struggle to sleep can change throughout your life. Common causes of sleeping issues include illness, work patterns, stress, or having children.

Your mind and body need good sleep so they can work at their best. While a few sleepless nights are usually nothing to worry about, it can become an issue if a lack of quality sleep affects your daily life. Most sleep problems are caused by bad sleep habits or poor bedtime routine.

Insomnia is a sleep disorder where people have difficulty falling or staying asleep at night. Most people experience insomnia at some point during their lifetime, and it can last for months or years.

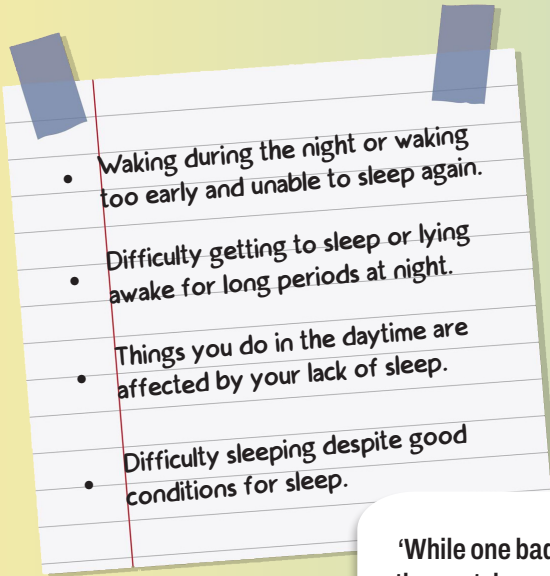
There are many elements that can affect your sleep...

- ✓ Poor sleep routine or sleeping too much during the day.
- ✓ Pain, discomfort or feeling unwell.
- ✓ Taking medicines that affect sleep, such as steroids.
- ✓ Anxiety or emotional distress.
- ✓ Smoking, alcohol, caffeine and other drugs.
- ✓ Temperature, light or noise.
- ✓ Life events, such as a cancer diagnosis.
- ✓ An uncomfortable bed.
- ✓ Lack of physical activity during the day.
- ✓ Menopause.

## Why do people develop sleeping problems?

If you only get a few hours' sleep every night, you may be worried that you have insomnia. But there are various reasons why you might not be sleeping as much. If you do not feel tired during the day, try not to worry about how many hours you slept the night before.

There are various symptoms associated with sleep problems...

- 
- Waking during the night or waking too early and unable to sleep again.
  - Difficulty getting to sleep or lying awake for long periods at night.
  - Things you do in the daytime are affected by your lack of sleep.
  - Difficulty sleeping despite good conditions for sleep.



'While one bad night's sleep will leave you feeling tired the next day, poor sleep over a period of time can affect your overall quality and enjoyment of life'

## Why does cancer affect sleep?

It is very common for people's sleep to be affected at all stages of a cancer journey, including before a diagnosis. There are many causes of broken sleep for cancer patients, including...

- ✓ The cancer itself
- ✓ Side effects of treatments
- ✓ Pain
- ✓ Worry, anxiety, depression



- ✓ Drugs
- ✓ Hormones
- ✓ Other medical conditions
- ✓ Sleeping environment

## **‘You may also have a history of sleep problems that have got worse since a diagnosis’**

A cancer diagnosis is lifechanging. It is to be expected that this will impact sleep. It is perfectly normal to feel a range of different emotions after a diagnosis. It is important not to ignore any sleep issues or consider them to be less important than a cancer diagnosis.

### **Why do cancer treatments affect sleep?**

No two cancers are the same and everyone's body responds in its own way. While treatments vary, a common feature of each is that they have the potential to disturb your sleep.

After treatment, it is common to need time for rest and recovery. This often includes taking naps, going to bed earlier, or sleeping longer. While these measures are essential for recovery, it is important to return to a regular sleeping routine once you feel up to it, otherwise you risk developing poor sleep habits.

### **Why is sleep still affected post-treatment?**

Once treatment has finished, your body continues to recover. The amount of time it takes to recover mentally, physically, and emotionally varies greatly for each person.

Even after completing treatment, many people struggle with worries about the cancer getting worse or coming back.

- ✓ Cancer survivors report much higher levels of sleep problems.
- ✓ Cancer-related insomnia can persist for years after treatment ends.
- ✓ Many cancer survivors just try to live with their sleep problems.
- ✓ Others look for ways to manage their symptoms.
- ✓ Some people turn to sleeping tablets, but this is not a good long-term solution.



**‘No matter where you are on your journey, there are always things you can do to help you address any sleep problems’**

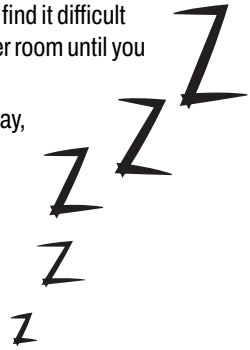
### **How can you improve your sleeping environment?**

- ✓ Keep your bedroom dark, quiet and comfortable.
- ✓ If too much light keeps you awake, try wearing an eye mask.
- ✓ If too much noise keeps you awake, you might benefit from using earplugs.
- ✓ If your room is either very warm or very cold, this may affect your sleep. Keep your bedroom at a comfortable and constant temperature, ideally between 16 and 20°C.

### **Keep your bedroom just for sleeping (and sex).**



- ✓ If you wake during the night and find it difficult to go back to sleep, go to another room until you feel ready to sleep again.
- ✓ If you need to sleep during the day, go to your bedroom to sleep.



### **How can treatments help you sleep?**

If you have a sleeping problem, it can help to take a short course of sleeping tablets. Doctors will generally only prescribe sleeping tablets for a week or two and may be cautious due to side effects and potential problems with tolerance and dependence.

Let your healthcare team know if you are having sleep problems. Certain drugs, being in pain, feeling sick or needing the toilet are all common issues that affect your sleep. Your doctor may be able to review your medication and how symptoms are managed.

**Helpful**



**Talking to someone about your fears and worries may help you cope better.**

**tips!**

- ✓ You could speak with a close friend or family member.
- ✓ You might prefer to talk someone outside your family, such as a counsellor.
- ✓ There are different types of counselling, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which helps you change the way you respond to situations or emotions.
- ✓ If you are worried about disturbed sleep, speak to your doctor or specialist nurse.

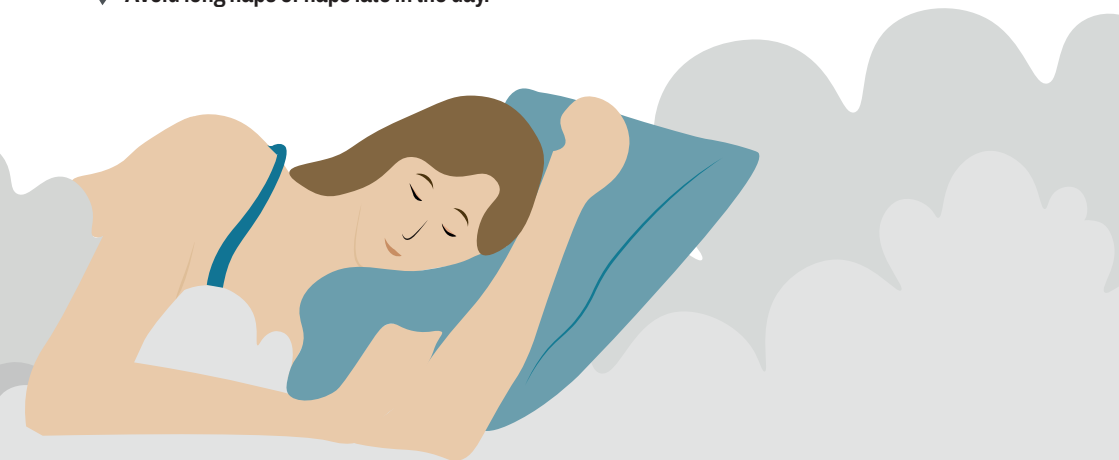
## How can you improve your sleep?

Good sleep habits help you sleep better.

Let's start by looking at things to avoid...

- ✓ Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening.
- ✓ Limit alcohol. This can help you get to sleep, but your sleep quality suffers.
- ✓ Limit nicotine late in the evening.
- ✓ Avoid screentime before bed, as the blue light makes your brain more active and delays sleep.
- ✓ Avoid going to bed hungry or thirsty or consuming too much food or drink before sleep.
- ✓ Avoid big meals, sugar and anything else that spikes stress levels before bedtime.
- ✓ Avoid long naps or naps late in the day.

**Things to avoid...**



Let's finish by looking at habits that can help improve your quality and quantity of sleep...

## Things to do...




- ✓ Keep a regular wake pattern. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- ✓ Make your bed as soon as you get out of it.
- ✓ Try to get as much natural light as possible when you wake up.
- ✓ Try to do physical activity during the day.
- ✓ Put the day to bed before you go to bed. Make time during the day to tackle any concerns.
- ✓ A warm bath two hours before bed can help your body reach the ideal temperature for sleep.
- ✓ Have a regular bedtime routine, as this tells your brain it is time to sleep.
- ✓ Try to relax before bed.
- ✓ Use mental exercises before sleep to focus your brain away from worries.

**‘Remember, you cannot force sleep. It happens when your body and your mind feel calm and safe. Do not concentrate on sleeping... concentrate on relaxing. Your brain will do the rest!’**

# Our partnership

The Northern Cancer Alliance is a collaboration of health and care partners across the North East and Cumbria who work to detect, treat and support people with cancer.

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Live Well with Cancer empowers anyone affected by cancer to improve their health and wellbeing through workshops, events, support groups and 1-2-1 support.

 [www.livewellwithcancer.co.uk](http://www.livewellwithcancer.co.uk)

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Transformational Learning is a North East based learning provider that specialises in quality resources and sessions that inspire positive change in wellness and education.

 [www.transformationallearning.co.uk](http://www.transformationallearning.co.uk)

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Special thanks to Professor Jason Ellis for delivering a series of Sleep Masterclasses that served as the basis for this booklet and The Sleep Better e-Learning series.





The Sleep Better Series aims to help you improve your quantity and quality of sleep. It consists of six modules that explore what sleep is, why it is important, and how you can improve your sleeping habits to sleep better.

Scan the QR code to check out our Sleep e-Learning resource!  
Or visit [www.transformationallearning.co.uk](http://www.transformationallearning.co.uk)