

## Sleeping problems

Insomnia and disturbed sleeping patterns are common problems in today's society. Not being able to fall asleep or waking up too early can be enormously frustrating and can result in exhaustion even before getting up. Sleep is a basic necessity of life. A chronic sleep deficit can have a huge physical, emotional and psychological impact: e.g. heart problems, obesity, poor concentration, memory loss, irritability, mood swings, depression, etc.

### QuickScan

- Do you have trouble falling asleep or do you wake up too early?
- Do you feel the need to have a nap during the day?
- Is fatigue affecting your performance?
- Are you slower, more irritable and less sharp than usual?
- Do you have difficulty retaining information or does your mind tend to wander?
- Do you have negative moods or do you feel depressed?

### Approach

#### What can you do yourself?

Observing the standard sleep hygiene rules is a good way to start working on a better sleeping pattern. It is important to realize that you cannot change your sleeping habits overnight! Your body needs time to adjust to the new rhythm. You could also try an online course: <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/sleepproblems.asp>

#### What can we do for you?

If you are unable to change your sleeping habits yourself or if you have the feeling there's more to your sleeping problems, please contact your GP and discuss the situation in order to rule out any medical causes. We can offer you short-term individual consultation and/or help you look for a suitable treatment outside of TU Delft. Visit <http://psychologists.tudelft.nl>.

### More information

- <http://umm.edu/health/medical/ency/articles/sleep-disorders-overview>
- <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/sleep-disorders-and-sleeping-problems.htm>
- <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/cant-sleep-insomnia-treatment.htm>
- The insomnia workbook: a comprehensive guide to getting the sleep you need (Stephanie Silberman), ISBN13: 9781572246355
- The effortless sleep method: the incredible new cure for insomnia and chronic sleep problems (Sasha Stephens), ISBN13: 9781456492540
- Tired but wired: how to overcome sleep problems: the essential sleep toolkit (Nerina Ramlakhan), ISBN13: 9780285638778

# Sleep hygiene

## Your Personal Habits

These personal habits can improve your sleep:

- Fix a bedtime and an awakening time, whether you are tired or not
- Avoid napping during the day
- Avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime
- Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime
- Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime
- Avoid screens (e.g. television, computer, telephone) 1 hour before bedtime
- Exercise regularly, but not right before bed (2 hours before bedtime)

## Your Sleeping Environment

You can optimize your sleeping environment:

- Use comfortable bedding
- Find a comfortable temperature setting for sleeping and keep the room well ventilated
- Block out all distracting noise, and eliminate as much light as possible
- Reserve the bed for sleep and sex

## Getting Ready For Bed

These activities you can do before going to bed:

- Try a light snack before bed (e.g. warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas)
- Practice relaxation techniques before bed.
- Don't take your worries to bed and assign a "worry period" during the evening or late afternoon
- Establish a pre-sleep ritual such as a warm bath or a few minutes of reading

## When lying in bed awake

Get into your favorite sleeping position. If you don't fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, get up, go into another room, and read until sleepy. When you find that you get up in the middle of night and cannot get back to sleep within 15-20 minutes, then do not remain in the bed "trying hard" to sleep. Get out of bed. Leave the bedroom. Read, have a light snack, do some quiet activity, or take a bath. You will generally find that you can get back to sleep 20 minutes or so later. Do not perform challenging or engaging activity such as office work, housework, etc. Do not watch television.

## Getting up

If you get up you can do the following:

- Get up when your alarm goes off and don't use your snooze button
- Immediately open your curtains and turn on the light

## Other Factors causing sleeping problems

Several physical factors are known to upset sleep, like menstruation and headaches. Psychological and mental health problems like depression, anxiety and stress are often associated with sleeping difficulty. Many medications can cause sleeplessness as a side effect. Always ask your GP, doctor or pharmacist for information and advice.

## References

- Moore, M. & Meltzer, L.J. (2008). The sleepy adolescent: causes and consequences of sleepiness in teens. *Paediatric Respiratory Reviews*, 9, 114 – 121.
- University of Maryland Medical Center (2010). Sleep hygiene: Helpful hints to help you sleep. Via [www.umm.edu/sleep](http://www.umm.edu/sleep).