



# New Pathways

Life beyond sexual violence

**Sea Change**

**Sleep Strategies**





## Role of sleep

Getting a good and healthy sleep balance helps to restore out of control stress levels.

Sleep is important in order to rest the body.



Sleep helps the processing of emotional experiences.



Sleep boosts wellbeing.





## Why is sleep so important

- It restores the body and brain
- Rapid eye moment (REM) stage of sleep is important for memory processing.
- It helps improve your immune system
- Night terrors are often made worse by lack of sleep.





## Top 5 tips to help sleep

- ◇ Enjoy active days and plenty of daylight
- ◇ Keep the later part of your evenings calm
- ◇ Make your bedroom a restful place to be
- ◇ Set routine; go to bed and get up at the same time each day
- ◇ Avoid tea, coffee and smoking too much in the evening



Taken from; *Sleep*, Unger, (2017)





## Why is sleep so difficult for me?

- People who have experienced trauma in their life can often find sleep difficult.
- Some people find it hard to get to sleep or stay asleep.
- People might experience; nightmares, night terrors, sleep walking, bedwetting, teeth grinding, and restless leg syndrome.
- Sometimes, people can even avoid going to sleep because they are worried about the nightmares or difficulties they might have with their sleep.
- Difficulties sleeping can make everything feel worse. It can feel very frustrating.





## The five stages of sleep

1. **Light sleep** is at the start of the cycle. Muscle activity decreases, twitching might occur. As this sleep is very light, it is when we are most likely to wake up.

2. **Real sleep** when we become properly unconscious- disconnected from our physical environment. In our body, breathing and heart rate stay regular but our body temperature begins to drop.

3. **Deep sleep** Totally relaxed, blood pressure drops. We might not wake up as easily- if there is a noise for example it might not immediately awake us. At this stage our brain produces delta waves- high brain activity. These stimulate growth and are thought to be an important part of the formation of memory.

4. **Restorative sleep** when our heart and breathing rate is at the lowest. Hormones are released that promote cell growth and muscle development. This is when the body repairs itself.

5. **REM** rapid eye moment- when our eyes dart back and forth beneath the lids and we appear to be watching some kind of scene. This is when we dream. If we wake during REM sleep we can usually recall the content of the interrupted dream. If we wake during other points of sleep we often do not remember having dreamt at all.

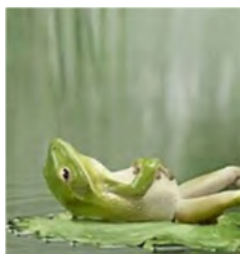




## **Top five ways to get ready for sleep**

1. Start to wind down
2. Focus on your breathing
3. Write down list of worries and to-do list
4. Keep your self talk; your thinking in your head kind, be kind to yourself.
5. Practice a guided visualization- letting go of the days worries





## Setting an alarm and a routine for sleep

- Preparing for sleep can help, putting ourselves in a calmer and more relaxed state and setting the right place for feeling comfortable for sleep can help.
- An alarm clock does not only need to be for waking us up, it can work as a reminder– a reminder to begin to get ready for sleep.
- You can set this alarm on the phone or on an actual alarm just ensure that you get ready for sleep a while before you are actually going to bed. You may even have a fitness tracker/fitbit which you can set an alarm on.
- You can use your phone or an actual alarm clock; set this around one hour before bedtime. Use this as a reminder to stop and notice/feel what is going on for you; are you tired?
- If you feel stress/worry where is this within your body. Once you find out where it is try out some slow breathing or holding a small amount of tension in that particular area of the body and then letting the tension go.
- You can write down some of the difficult thoughts or feelings you are having and put them on a piece of paper somewhere outside your room so they are no longer sitting in your head.
- You might want to try having a warm bath before bed to help with relaxation. It might be important for you to have a window slightly open or a fan or breeze if you feel your body temperature is too high.
- Try slow intakes and exhales of breath, breathing in for the count of five and out ward breaths for the count of 7.





## Creating a place comfortable for sleep

It is important to take this time and look at where you sleep, and make some decisions about whether this the right sleep place for you.



### What do you need to change?

Your bedroom is only for sleeping, this is important. Try not to have work items, homework, your phone, emails, iPad and TVs on because they cause our brains to think they should be awake. While you are trying to improve sleep, as soon as you get into bed put out the light and try to sleep. If you need to keep your phone on as an alarm, try not to use it just before sleep.

### Are there things you can replace or move around?

Look at your bedroom if you can with fresh eyes as if looking at it for the first time and see if there is anything you would like to move around or change to make the room more comfortable for you.





## Sleep do's and don'ts

### Don't

Stay in the bedroom if you cant sleep after 20 minutes

Eat just before going to bed

Look at screens before sleep or when waking

Use your bed to complete work on or having work things on the bed

Nap for more than half an hour during the day time

### Do

Prepare for sleep

Create a sleep place that feels comfortable for you

Build up sleep skills or coping strategies for when you cannot sleep

Do some stretching before sleep

Keep up a routine

It can be really difficult to improve sleep and difficult to follow all of these ideas. It takes time and practise.

These skills make great demands on you in the first few nights. It is very tempting to stay in bed after 20 minutes, to have a long lie in or to have an afternoon nap because you can barely keep your eyes open.

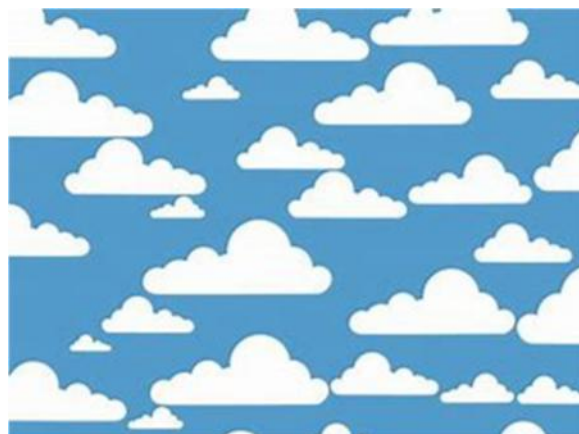
- Fight these urges.
- Don't expect rapid change.
- It might take a while to change





## Simple sleep strategies

1. Set a schedule; set regular routine, even on your day off don't sleep in too long.
2. Don't force yourself to sleep; If you haven't fallen asleep after 20 minutes in bed, get up and do something calming– drawing, reading etc, avoid bright lights and screens (phones, tablets etc)
3. Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol and smoking before bed
4. Avoid napping– naps that are over an hour long, or ones later in the day are particularly harmful to sleep routine.
5. Only use bed for sleeping; using bed for doing work, watching TV or other activities will mean your brain associates bed with these activities instead of sleep. Use bed only for sleeping.
6. Exercise and eat well; avoid strenuous exercise and any big meals 2 hours before sleep.
7. Sleep in a comfortable space; make sure where you sleep feels comfortable for you.





## Bedtime foods

- A glass of warmed milk; as it contains the amino acid tryptophan, which aids in the production of the sleep hormone melatonin.
  - Oats, bananas and turkey also contain tryptophan.
  - A few carbs in the evening can help.
- A handful of cherries or glass of tart cherry juice— cherries are rich in melatonin.





## **Dream diary or notebook**

Sometimes dreams/nightmares can upset us. This dream/nightmare might stay with us, and we might feel unable to stop thinking about it. It might help to write the dream down into a notebook.

You can keep a note book by the bed or even in a different room if you want to keep the dreams away from the bedroom if they feel frightening or scary.

Some people find re-writing dreams with a new, better ending can be helpful. This can be a completely different ending to how the dream had ended.





## The dream team

- Think about if you could change your dream, you could bring in anything, anyone, any object, pet, animal, magic you need to change the ending or the formation of your dream.
- Think of a dream that has caused you mild discomfort, nothing too painful or difficult.
- Find your rescuer (s), your hero, find a magic power, an animal, a powerful object...that will help you change your dream.

You can try out drawing this hero. You could draw different version of the dream as a way of making it more clear in your mind.

You could keep this drawing next to the bed; a drawing of the hero or rescuer. Sometimes it can be helpful to have some colouring pages next to the bed as well. This can be used if you are to wake from a dream you might want to take these into another room to sit and do some calming colouring before going back to bed.





## **Try out a body scan before bed**

What do we mean by body scan?

To notice in your body can you feel each part, can you notice it, can you try out tensing this part and slowly, over 15 seconds, release this tension? This can be part of a morning routine or bedtime or both.

This is not about aerobic exercise as increased heart rates and respiration increase can be a trauma trigger. This exercise is about body awareness and focus and it is slow, focussed muscle tension that can help.

Try tensing (not too much) the muscles in the backs of your calf

Hold the tension and very, very slowly release over 15 seconds, counting slowly in your head.

This exercise can be used as an emergency measure when anxiety or flashbacks threaten to overwhelm into panic.

The concept is to build a positive experience of being in the body by developing musculature that can better contain hyperarousal.

(Rothschild, 2000).



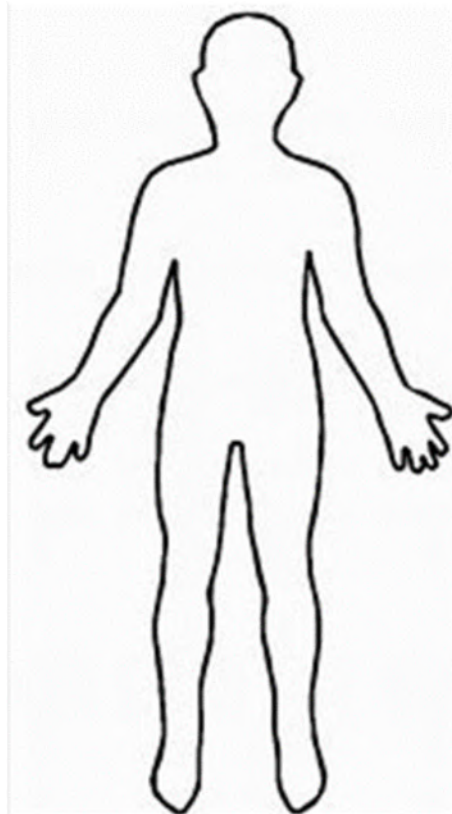




## Muscle tone for bedtime

Completing relaxation and body scans before sleep can be one way to achieve better sleep.

- Body scan from toes to head, or head to toes
- Hold tension, tighten muscle up (not too much) and release over 15 seconds.
- If 15 seconds does not work increase to 30 seconds.







## Sleep exercise

1. Find a basket or box you can keep next to the bed. Fill this box with comforting things building this from the five senses, find touch, tastes, sights, sounds and smells that comfort you and calm the senses.



This might be a favourite stuffed animal, a special pillow or blanket or piece of fabric, a favourite book or picture. This may also include a photograph or drawing of a safe place- real or imaginary, a list of pleasant experiences or hopes, and people to call in emergency could all be included in the box/basket.





## New Pathways Sleep exercise continued

Life beyond sexual violence

2. Put a positive object/image which is soothing/uplifting for you either side of the bed, this can be something that can be looked at or held that helps to bring you back to the 'here and now'.
3. Prior to going to bed try listening to calming music, or sounds or audio books or noises that calm you.
4. Include a dream journal inside the sleep kit, this journal can be used to write down dreams, re-script dreams or draw dreams into. Within the dream journal include some pages of intricate/complicated colouring patterns or pictures- for example the adult colouring book pages. Along with your dream journal include some colouring pencils and pens.

(Christiane Sanderson, 2013)





## Top 5 ways to drop off to sleep

- ◇ Focus on the sound of your breathing
  - ◇ Turn off electronic devices
- ◇ Write down tomorrow's 'to do' list and leave it in a different room
- ◇ Think of something calming: kites flying or clouds drifting by
- ◇ Don't reproach yourself for lying awake, keep your inner voice kind.



## Top 5 ways to deal with wakefulness

- ◇ Get out of bed if you can't sleep
- ◇ Do something repetitive or calming, such as colouring or housework
  - ◇ Write down the thoughts that are keeping you awake
    - ◇ Do some gentle yoga or stretching
  - ◇ Drink a cup of herbal tea or warm milk



Taken from; *Sleep*, Unger, (2017)



**Never suffer in silence, please contact us...**

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**New Pathways**  
Life beyond sexual violence

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We have many years of experience and are widely regarded throughout the UK as a leading organisation in our field.

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