

Sleep

This leaflet is intended to provide some information and tips on how to find a good night's sleep.

Non-Restful Sleep

The rhythm of sleep and the need for sleep are individually very different. Sleep is a process that cannot be controlled in all its facets.

Sometimes an overly critical view of your own sleep can even have opposite effects. Understanding the basic principles of healthy sleep can prevent insomnia. Furthermore, it can help people with sleep disorders to get a good night's sleep again (Hertenstein, Spiegelhalter, Johann, & Riemann, 2015).

Non-restful sleep can have various causes - stress can be an important factor.

The current COVID-19 pandemic, which has significant health, social and economic consequences, can cause acute sleep disorders in humans.

Most sleep problems appear temporarily and disappear spontaneously without the need for treatment. However, in some cases, chronic sleep disorders can occur.

Concept of Sleep

The 2-process-model according to Borbély (1988) represents a general concept of sleep regulation.

For detailed explanations we recommend the book «Schlaf-Wach-Funktionen» (please see references below). In short, the two phases, alertness and sleep pressure, alternate during the day. The homeostatic process S (also called sleep pressure) increases with the duration of wakefulness and decreases again during the night. The circadian process C (individual biological rhythm) reaches its maximum in the afternoon and its minimum in the early morning hours.

The easiest way to fall asleep is when the difference between Process S and C is greatest (Borbély, 1988). Simply put, don't go to sleep until you're really sleepy.

What are signs of a sleep disorder?

- Difficulties falling asleep
- Pronounced musing before falling asleep
- Multiple wake-ups at night and long falling-asleep times
- Awakening early in the morning
- Daytime sleepiness
- Performance is reduced
- Attentional problems

Sleep Hygiene

The so-called sleep hygiene provides guidance on how to promote restful sleep. The recommendations are based on the concept of the Freiburger Schlafschule (Hertenstein et al., 2015):

Evening routine

An evening routine makes it easier for you to attune yourself to sleep.

For example, by

- drinking a cup of tea in the evening (no caffeine)
- applying relaxation exercises
- reading

Regular engagement in these routines before bedtime can help you calm down more easily.

Regular bed and sleeping times

- Set yourself fixed times for going to bed and getting up in the morning (you should also take these into account at the weekend).
- The sleeping time differs individually. On average, people get by with 7-8 hours of sleep.

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Sleep Hygiene (Continuation)

Sleep environment

- If possible, the bedroom should only serve the purpose of sleeping. Technical media including telephone or workplaces should not be part of your bedroom.
- Make sure that your bedroom has a low temperature (17-20 degrees), is regularly ventilated and completely dark during the night.
- You could minimize noise by wearing earplugs.
- A good pillow and regularly washed bed linen can provide a pleasant sleeping atmosphere.
- Make sure you don't work in bed, surf the web, or read too much.

Try to avoid the following things:

- Alcohol or drugs should be avoided as much as possible - even if this helps initiating your sleep in the short run, it can increase sleep disorders in the long run, and other problems such as addiction can arise.
- We also advise against taking sleeping pills - unless you have talked about it with your doctor
- Don't look at your watch at night. This can lead to unnecessary tension and falling asleep can be made more difficult by the light stimulus.
- Avoid compensating for lack of sleep during the day by sleeping or by extending bedtime. As a result, the sleep pressure is reduced and the sleep disorder persists.
- Avoid eating heavy meals in the evening.
- If possible, leave out caffeinated drinks after lunch.
- Plan exhausting sporting activities during the day or 3 hours before bedtime. In the evening, activating sport can cause the sleep phase to be postponed and to last longer.

Stimulus Control

Stimulus Control is a simple and useful tool in the treatment of sleep disorders. The goal is to reduce long bed times and to associate the sleeping environment with a sleep-promoting inner (mental) state.

If you lie awake in bed for a long time and tend to ponder (also about why you cannot sleep), this can

lead to restlessness and tension. As a consequence, the bed is linked to a tense, internally restless state. Through targeted stimulus control, you can positively influence your sleeping behaviour:

- Do not go to sleep until you feel sleepy.
- As soon as you are awake for more than 15 minutes unable to fall sleep again, you should get out of bed. For example, you can sit on a chair, read something pleasant or listen to relaxing music and only return to bed when you are really sleepy.
- Additionally, apply all points of the sleep hygiene.

References and Resources

Borbély, A. (1988). *Das Zwei-Prozess-Modell der Schlafregulation*. In *Schlaf-Wach-Funktionen* (pp. 1-4): Springer.

Hertenstein, E., Spiegelhalder, K., Johann, A., & Riemann, D. (2015). *Prävention und Psychotherapie der Insomnie: Konzepte, Methoden und Praxis der Freiburger Schlafschule*: Kohlhammer Verlag.

DGSM. (2009). *S3-Leitlinie Nicht erholsamer Schlaf/Schlafstörungen*. *Somnologie - Schlafforschung und Schlafmedizin*, 13(1), 1-160.

Consult a Specialist

If your sleep has still not improved, we suggest to consult a medical doctor (see leaflet „Mental Health Support“).

General doctors can often help and clarify somatic causes of sleep disorders.

Any Questions?

If you have further questions, please see the contact details for mental health support that are listed in our leaflet „[Mental Health Support](#)“, as well as the references and links in this document. Please note that while we select links to external websites carefully, we cannot guarantee for the accuracy or quality of these websites.