HELP for HEROES

RECOVERY COLLEGE:
SELF–HELP GUIDES
TO RECOVERY

MOVE FORWARD:
**SLEEPING
WELL**

WHY IS GOOD SLEEP IMPORTANT?

Sleep is important for your physical and mental health. It helps your brain recharge and your muscles to repair themselves at the end of each day. In fact sleep is regarded as one of the most important factors when it comes to physical recovery, especially if you are exercising.

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WITHOUT ADEQUATE SLEEP YOU MAY BECOME:

+ **TIRED**

+ **ANXIOUS**

+ **IRRITABLE**

+ **DEPRESSED**

The amount of sleep a person needs to function well in the day can vary. Whether you are naturally a short sleeper needing six hours, or a longer sleeper needing eight hours, this is what you should aim for. The popular recommendation of eight hours is based on an average for the population, but people vary.

In this guide, you'll learn some of the common causes of sleep problems, and some simple techniques for getting a better night's sleep.
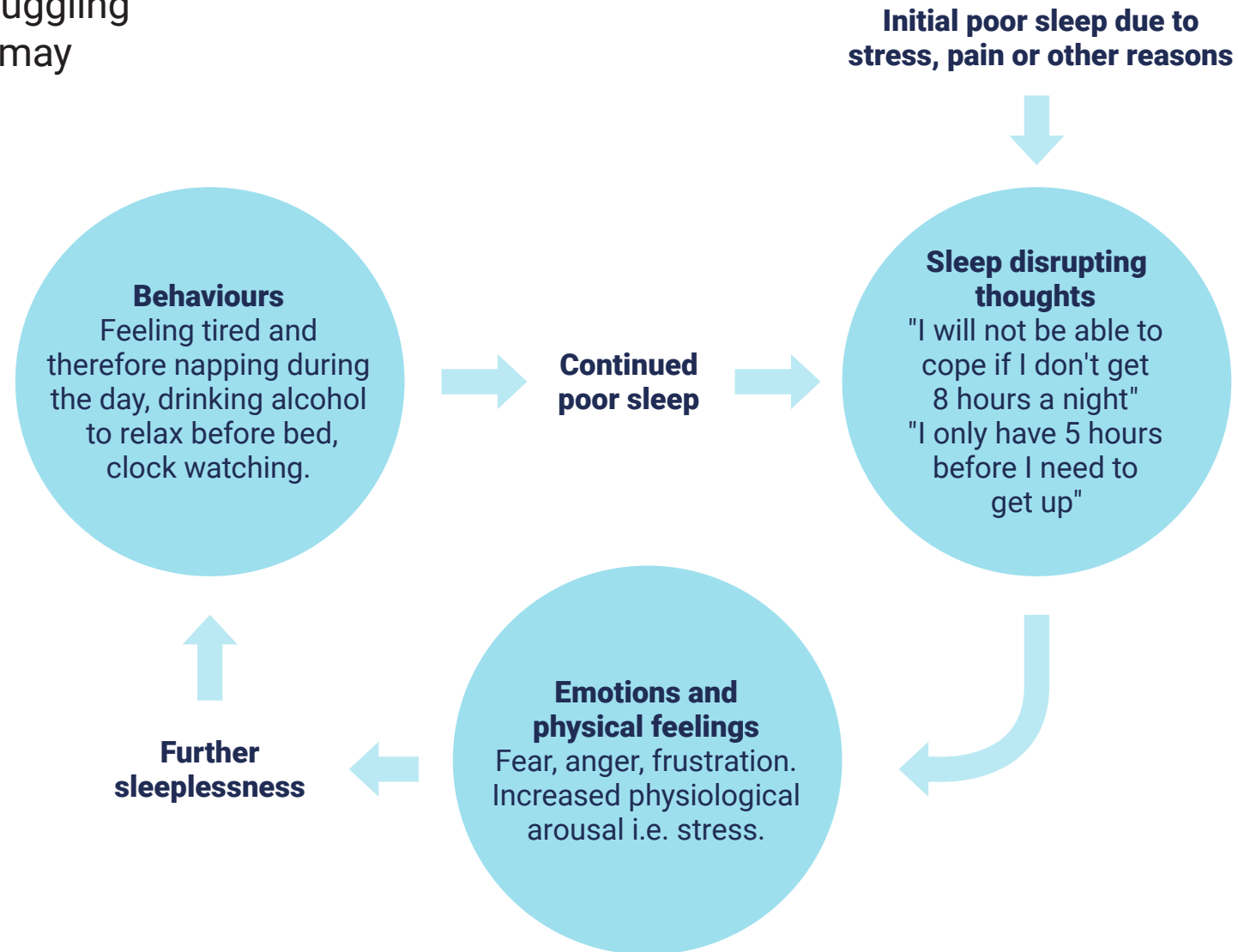
WHAT AFFECTS OUR SLEEP?

There are lots of common causes of sleep problems. Any one of the following can easily disrupt your sleep, and more than one of these combined can have an even more adverse effect on your sleeping patterns:

Worry, stress, anxiety, low mood

Environment

Pain/ physical discomfort

Disrupted routine

Sleep Problems

Stimulants

Medical Problems

Diet or eating habits

When one or more of these things disrupt your sleep, you can quickly fall into a negative sleep cycle.

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PERPETUATING SLEEP DIFFICULTIES

If you ever lay awake, struggling to nod off, the following may be familiar to you:

Initial poor sleep due to stress, pain or other reasons

Behaviours
Feeling tired and therefore napping during the day, drinking alcohol to relax before bed, clock watching.

Continued poor sleep

Sleep disrupting thoughts
"I will not be able to cope if I don't get 8 hours a night"
"I only have 5 hours before I need to get up"

Further sleeplessness

Emotions and physical feelings
Fear, anger, frustration. Increased physiological arousal i.e. stress.

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BREAKING THE CYCLE: THE PATH TO A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP

Having trouble sleeping is very common, and you are not alone: a survey of those we support showed 42% had sleep issues*.

Often, the first positive step to identifying a sleep issue is to understand the root cause of it.

* 1,161 wounded veterans & serving personnel and 149 family members took part in a survey sent by Help for Heroes during the week commencing 11 May 2020 to over 15,000 wounded, injured and sick veterans, serving personnel and family members, to understand how their support needs have changed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Feeling exhausted is common and the reasons can be down to obvious things such as:

+ **STAYING UP LATE AT NIGHT**

+ **NAPPING DURING THE DAY**

+ **WORKING LONG HOURS OR NIGHT SHIFTS**

+ **DRINKING A LOT OF CAFFEINE**

+ **GETTING UP TO A YOUNG CHILD AT NIGHT.**

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SOMETIMES, THERE MIGHT BE OTHER CAUSES TO ADDRESS:

+ **PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES (SUCH AS LONG-TERM STRESS, DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY)**

+ **PHYSICAL CAUSES (SUCH AS MEDICAL CONDITIONS)**

+ **LIFESTYLE CAUSES (SUCH AS POOR DIET, A LACK OF EXERCISE, OR DRINKING TOO MUCH ALCOHOL).**

We recognise there is rarely only one reason for sleep difficulties and if you are experiencing sleep problems and worried about the cause, it is best to speak to your GP.

What we can share with you here are some simple tips and tools, which you can easily try out at home, to help you get a better night's rest.

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WAYS TO A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP

+ Try to establish a 'night-time routine' that works for you and that gets your brain into the habit of going to bed and sleeping at a set time. For example, you could try having a warm bath, listening to some relaxing music or reading a book for an hour before bed time, to help your mind unwind.

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+ **Only go to bed when you feel sleepy so you associate being in bed with feeling tired. If you can't get to sleep within 20–30 minutes, get up and leave your bedroom to do something relaxing until you feel sleepy again.**

+ **Create a relaxing atmosphere – make sure your bedroom is not too hot or cold and that it is quiet. Consider using ear plugs if you need to eliminate the noise of things like traffic outside.**

+ **Remove the clock (or phone) from your bedside table or turn it away so you can't 'clock watch'.**

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+ **Try not to eat too close to bed time. If you do feel hungry try having a digestive biscuit rather than something heavy. Having a balanced and healthy diet throughout the day can also help you to sleep better at night. Take a look at our Self-Guide to Eating Well for lots of tips on healthy eating.**

+ **Avoid watching TV, playing computer games or doing other daytime activities in bed.**

+ **Try to avoid napping during the day, as this can disrupt your ability to sleep at night.**

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+ **Avoid drinking caffeine after midday – it stays in your system longer than you think.**

+ **Avoid looking at back-lit screens, for example your phone, laptop or tablet just before bed time, as these stimulate the brain and can keep you awake.**

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Name:			How long have you had difficulty with your sleep:				
Questions	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
What time did you go to bed last night?							
Once you were settled, how long did it take you to fall asleep?							
What was the total length of time were you awake for during the night, after you initially fell asleep?							
What time did you finally wake up?							
What time did you get up?							
Did you take any sleeping medication last night?							
Did you nap yesterday?							
How well do you feel this morning? 0 (not at all) 1 2 (moderately) 3 4 (very)							
How enjoyable was your sleep last night? 0 (not at all) 1 2 (moderately) 3 4 (very)							
How active was your mind in bed last night? 0 (not at all) 1 2 (moderately) 3 4 (very)							
How physically tense were you in bed last night? 0 (not at all) 1 2 (moderately) 3 4 (very)							
How anxious were you in bed last night? 0 (not at all) 1 2 (moderately) 3 4 (very)							

AND FINALLY...

Today's society is 24/7 and it can be harder than ever to switch off. Often, we try to do too much and end up feeling exhausted, then add even more pressure onto ourselves by trying to force ourselves to sleep! If you are having trouble sleeping, don't be hard on yourself. Sleep is an important part of self-care and simply by trying some of the practical tips listed here you are taking a positive step in your recovery journey. If you are worried about the underlying cause of your inability to sleep, speak to your GP for advice.

If you have any questions at all, take positive action by contacting a member of our Recovery team: **getsupport@helpforheroes.org.uk**

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