

GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP?

This pamphlet has been produced by Clyst Vale Community College's Counselling Service. This is not intended to be a definitive guide, but does hope to provide information about getting a good night's sleep.

Sleep is an essential activity. When we get a good night's sleep we often wake feeling refreshed, and ready to deal with the day. Sleep is a busy time for our body. Did you know our bodies run repairs and also do most of their growing when we are asleep?

Dreaming

Scientists are still trying to work out what our dreaming is all about. There are different views. Some believe dreaming helps our learning process and generally de-clutters our mind ready for the next day. Other people believe our dreams have meaning and we can understand ourselves better if we think about our dreams. Sometimes people wake unable to remember their dream. At other times people wake remembering vivid details of their dream.

Sleeping patterns

Our bodies quickly form rhythms – when to eat, when to go to the loo etc. Sleeping has its own rhythm, often called a sleeping pattern. We can form healthy sleeping patterns and unhealthy ones. These sleeping patterns can change if we disturb our routine, for instance going to bed later than usual, or getting up earlier. We can re-train our sleeping pattern if it proves unhealthy.

Age affects how much sleep you need

At different ages of your life you will need different amounts of sleep. Typically a young person needs 7 – 10 hours of uninterrupted sleep a night.

Problems falling asleep

Sometimes it can be difficult getting to sleep. There can be lots of reasons for this - a noisy environment, bedroom at the wrong temperature, too stuffy in the room, worrying about something, eating or drinking the wrong food to name a few!

Worrying about not being able to sleep

If we have trouble falling asleep we can worry about it when we go to bed. This can make sleeping very difficult. The more we don't sleep, the more we worry and the less likely we will drop off. It's called a vicious cycle.

Here is a list of things you can do to help yourself fall asleep:

- Make sure your bed is comfortable, no wrinkles in the sheets, clean sheets etc.
- Adjust the temperature in your room, perhaps leave a window slightly open (check with your parents first so they can make sure your room is still secure)
- If your environment is too noisy, let your parents know. There are ear plugs available on the market that might make a big difference.
- Avoid using the computer for at least two hours before going to bed
- Avoid watching television an hour before you go to bed
- Avoid food and drinks with caffeine in them like fizzy drinks after about 6.00 pm

Exercise

Sometimes we can't sleep even though our brain feels tired, because our body still has lots of energy. Try to make sure your day includes some exercise – a run, some sport, personal training etc. This way your body will feel tired too.

Tension

If we feel too tense we can find falling asleep difficult. Try to relax. Remember if you worry you'll find falling asleep more difficult. Ask the school for one of the counsellor's relaxation leaflets. Exercise is very good at helping us to relax.

If you know someone who has been trained to give a professional massage, why not ask for one? Massage is a great way to relax and can often leave you feeling very sleepy.

Remedies

A very old remedy is a warm milky drink before going to bed. It works for lots of people. Eating a banana (or even lettuce) an hour before going to bed can also help. These foods contain natural substances that make the body and mind feel sleepy.

Staying asleep

For some people it's not falling asleep that's difficult, it's staying asleep. If you find yourself waking up in the small hours of the night on a regular basis read on. We can wake up for several reasons – to go to the loo, because we're worried about something, or perhaps we may even be depressed. Make an appointment to see a counsellor if you find you wake up in the small hours and they will help you sort out if there's anything that might be worrying you.

Don'ts

Try not to lie there worrying about not sleeping, this will only keep you awake longer. Have a book by your bed to read, often you only need to read a couple of pages before you can fall back to sleep. Have a radio nearby, choose something that is soothing, or boring, and just listen to the sounds. Don't worry about turning it off. Set the volume on very low and just drift off.

Health

Sometimes if we can't sleep properly there may be a medical reason. Make an appointment to see the school nurse or your doctor – they may be able to help you too. Sometimes not being able to sleep or stay asleep is a sign of depression. See the counsellors, school nurse or your doctor for help if you think you may be depressed. Depression is very common.

Sleep debt

Often if we haven't slept well for a few days our bodies collect a sleep debt. This sleep debt gets repaid when we have our next good night's sleep. Problems sleeping are very common. Tell your parents, they may be able to help you. Come and see one of the counsellors or the school nurse.