

# “TO SLEEP... PERCHANCE TO DREAM”

*Macbeth - William Shakespeare*

## Why is sleep important?

Sleep is a fundamental requirement. Sleep is an active process during which the body tissue is repaired. It is really important for our emotional functioning. When we are deprived of sleep it can affect memory and concentration. We can feel anxious and irritable as a consequence of lack of sleep.

## What happens during sleep?

Sleep is divided into two parts-REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep and non-REM sleep. REM sleep is described as the dream period and is the time of most intense brain activity during sleep. The eyeballs move actively under the eyelid at this time, hence the name. Non-REM sleep is a period of restful sleep that consists of four stages, and as we move through the stages the body becomes more relaxed. Generally, you go through the REM and non-REM stages in a sequence known as the sleep cycle, and this cycle is repeated 4-5 times per night. We all need different quantities of sleep, and if you feel rested and can function well during the day, you are getting enough sleep.

## Is my sleep disturbance a problem?

Everyone has some nights of sleep disturbance, especially if there is something important on their mind, or they have experienced an upsetting life event. A bad night's sleep can be a difficult experience. Things can generally settle down and can improve with some good sleep hygiene (see below). There are situations when it can become a longer term or more regular problem, and can impact on social/work/family life/and everyday activities. Sleep problems are especially problematic with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression,



anxiety, or other mental health difficulties. We tend to become preoccupied with and try to do everything we can to get to sleep. What we think and feel about sleep is extremely important. Thoughts like 'I will never cope today, or why can I not sleep' and many other images/thoughts/memories can race endlessly through your mind. There is a tendency to measure our sleep-how long did I sleep for, how many times did I wake up?

## What can I do to help? Some sleep behaviour tips:-

- sleeping during the day can reduce the body's drive for sleep at night, so avoid daytime naps or restrict them to 15 minutes
- relaxation exercises which include deep breathing can help slow the brain and body down
- do not toss and turn in bed for more than 20-30 minutes-it is more helpful to get out of bed and return to bed when sleepy.
- tell yourself messages such as 'It doesn't matter if I sleep, I don't care if I am tired tomorrow'-these types of messages will

allow for the body system to relax more.

When you are not too concerned about trying to sleep, you become more relaxed

- regular bed time and waking time, regular exercise, avoid heavy meals within 3 hours of bedtime. Avoid stimulants-tea/coffee/caffeinated drinks after 3pm.

Look at self-help material and sleep guidance online; try the CBT 'overcoming' books. Talk to a therapist at PRRT if general sleep advice is not helping, as resolving other issues such as traumatic images may also help with your sleep.

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**REM SLEEP IS  
DESCRIBED AS THE  
DREAM PERIOD  
AND IS THE TIME  
OF MOST INTENSE  
BRAIN ACTIVITY  
DURING SLEEP.**”

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