

Journeys also has a more detailed booklet available on depression and sleep.

Find which sleep-promoting routines work best for you, and keep to them.

Avoid activities or substances that are likely to prevent you from sleeping well.

See your GP if sleeping problems persist.

Journeys is the only organisation in Wales whose sole purpose is to offer support and understanding to people affected by depression, their friends, families and carers.

Journeys takes a holistic approach to overcoming depression through guided self-help and the development of skills and strategies. We help people to find their own route to recovery, building the foundations for sustainable and long-term wellbeing.

We facilitate a network of self-help groups where people can share experiences and coping strategies; offer information and advice; provide a unique range of publications and practical resources covering many depression related topics; run training courses to help people understand, manage and recover from depression; and co-ordinate mutual support services. We also offer a free information pack.

To request a free information pack or to find out more please contact us.

Call 029 2069 2891

Email info@journeysonline.org.uk

www.journeysonline.org.uk

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Registered office: 120-122 Broadway, Roath, Cardiff CF24 1NJ

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A Good Night's Sleep

Improved sleep can help you on your road to recovery from depression.



What is depression?

Everyone feels sad or upset sometimes, it is a normal response to difficult or distressing experiences. Depression is different. It is a serious condition that involves symptoms that are so intense that they interfere with day to day living over a prolonged period of time.

This includes feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, low self-esteem and physical aches and pains.

One of the most troubling symptoms of depression is disturbed sleep. If you have been experiencing disturbed sleep for more than a fortnight you should visit your doctor.

How does depression affect sleep?

Depression can disturb sleep in the following ways:

- ↔ Being unable to get off to sleep at night
- ↔ Early waking
- ↔ Daytime tiredness

Problems getting to sleep are usually to do with worrying about things that have happened during the day and/or things that may happen the following day.

Early waking is the result of an imbalance between deep sleep (which relaxes the body) and Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep (that processes thoughts and emotions). People who are stressed or depressed tend to have more REM sleep, which is more tiring than being awake. As a result, your system will wake you up in the early hours in an attempt to conserve energy.

Not getting off to sleep and early waking lead to daytime tiredness. Over time they can result in exhaustion, which has a negative impact on mood and daytime activities. Exhaustion is dangerous for people who drive or operate machinery.

Quick fixes

People often turn to alcohol to help them get to sleep, and use caffeine, nicotine and sugary foods to help them stay awake during the day. In the short-term, these substances are not a problem but longer term each can have a detrimental effect on general health.

So while you may have used these substances occasionally in the past, continued use will make you feel worse and add to your depression.

Formal treatments

Sleep is one of those areas where there are few medical solutions. In extreme cases, doctors may offer sleeping tablets. Some antidepressants can have sedative qualities, so your doctor may choose one of these if disrupted sleep is a particular problem.

If disrupted sleep persists your doctor may refer you for a talking therapy to help deal with the underlying problems.

What can you do?

There are many things you can do yourself to improve your sleep.

Do:

- ↔ Get into a sleep-promoting routine in the run up to bedtime
- ↔ Set a time for bed, and stick to it
- ↔ Make the bedroom a comfortable place to sleep. Try to have clean bed linen as often as is practical. Keep the bedroom uncluttered, aired and not too hot or cold
- ↔ Prepare for sleep. You could do some physical activity to tire your body during the early evening, listen to a relaxation tape, have a warm relaxing bath or take a milky drink before going to bed
- ↔ Deal with worrying thoughts. Have a pen and paper next to the bed and write down any worries. Attend to them in the morning
- ↔ Use relaxation techniques to help your body and mind "let go"
- ↔ Develop daytime routines, especially those that get you out of the house. These can help you avoid the temptation to 'catch-up on sleep' during the day

Don't:

- ↔ Sleep during the day
- ↔ Use caffeine or other stimulants after 6.00pm
- ↔ Watch TV, play computer games or engage in other alerting activities in the hour before bed
- ↔ Work into the night
- ↔ Have a clock in the bedroom. If you need one, place it out of reach and facing away from you
- ↔ Exercise late at night