

SLEEP HEALTH IMPROVING WELLBEING

BRINGING HEALTH TO LIFE

mohs workplace health

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INTRODUCTION

Sleep Health

Sleep health supports our physical and mental health, which in turn impacts our wellbeing in the workplace. This toolkit provides practical guidance to help readers develop healthier sleep habits. We take a close look at the causes, solutions and considerations for our sleep.

The benefits of improving your sleep

- Sleep can regulate mood and reduce everyday stress.
- Quality sleep supports physical health and strengthens immune function.
- Consistent sleep can improve energy levels throughout the day.
- Sleep improves concentration, attention and memory at work.
- Healthy sleep habits reduce the risk of accidents in the workplace.



Who are we?

MOHS Workplace Health is a specialist provider of occupational health and safety services. We support organisations across all sectors in creating safer, healthier working environments through expert guidance, training, assessments and compliance. Our mission is to help employers protect their people, reduce risk and operate with confidence.

SLEEP STAGES

Sleep is an active process that gives the body and brain time to recover. It consists of four stages: three stages of non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep and one stage of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Throughout the night, we move through these stages in repeated cycles, each lasting around 90 minutes.



Understanding the stages of sleep

- **Stage 1 – Light sleep:** The transition between being awake and asleep. Breathing and heart rate begins to slow, and you can wake easily.
- **Stage 2 – Intermediate sleep:** The body relaxes further, body temperature drops, breathing and heart rate slows. We spend the largest proportion of the night in this stage.
- **Stage 3 – Deep sleep:** The body carries out physical recovery, including tissue repair and immune support. Waking during this stage can leave you feeling groggy.
- **Stage 4 – REM sleep:** Brain activity increases, and vivid dreams become more common. This stage supports learning, memory and emotional processing.

How much sleep do you need?

Sleep requirements vary with age. Adults aged 18 to 64 generally need 7 to 9 hours per night, while adults aged 65 and over typically need 7 to 8 hours. Teenagers aged 13 to 17 need 8 to 10 hours. Individual needs differ, so workers should take into account how refreshed and alert they feel during the day.

CAUSES

Poor sleep can affect anyone but the reasons are not always obvious. Sometimes, worries about work or everyday life make it difficult to switch off at night. Changes to working hours or daily routines can disrupt the body's natural sleep pattern. For others, poor sleep might be linked to an underlying health condition or changes in mood. Even your bedroom environment can make a difference. When sleep problems are persistent, understanding what might be causing them is an important first step towards improving sleep and wellbeing. In many cases, a sleep disorder is responsible.



SLEEP DISORDERS

Insomnia

- Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or waking too early.

Sleep apnoea

- Breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep.

Restless legs syndrome

- An urge to move the legs disrupts sleep.

Narcolepsy

- Excessive daytime sleepiness and sudden sleep attacks.

Parasomnias

- Unusual behaviours or experiences during sleep.

Circadian rhythm disorders

- Disrupted body clock affecting sleep patterns.

SIGNS OF A SLEEP PROBLEM

Everyone has a poor night's sleep from time to time. However, when it becomes a regular event, it can affect how we feel and cope with everyday life. Paying attention to changes in your sleep and how you feel during the day can help you recognise when something is wrong. Understanding these changes is an important step in knowing when to seek support.

Common signs

- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Waking several times during the night.
- Waking too early and struggling to return to sleep.
- Feeling tired, sleepy or irritable during the day.
- Finding it difficult to concentrate on everyday tasks.
- Struggling to cope with normal daily activities.
- Feeling more stressed or emotionally exhausted.
- Having dark circles around the eyes or puffiness.

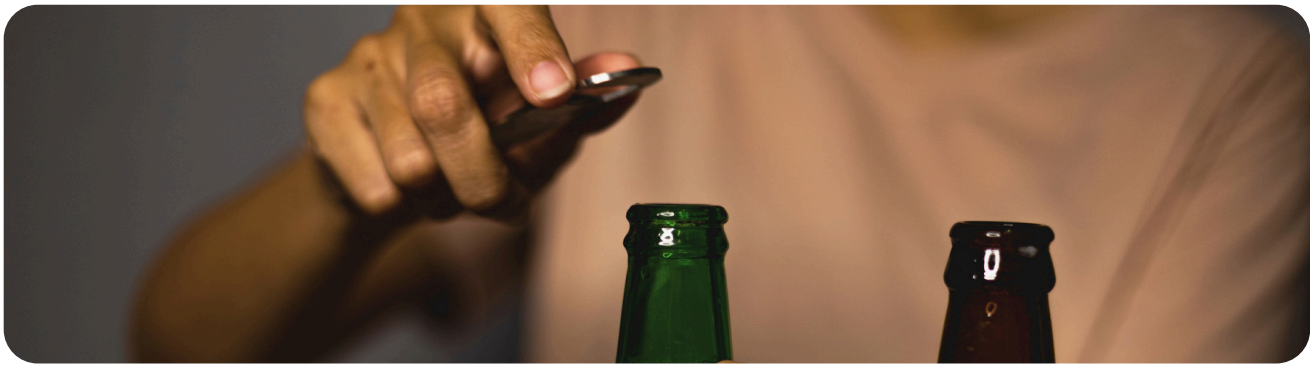
Long term sleep problems

When sleep problems persist over time, the effects can extend beyond feeling tired. Poor sleep can affect concentration, memory and mood, which ultimately will affect your ability to manage your everyday responsibilities. It can also put a strain on relationships and reduce enjoyment of daily activities. If sleep difficulties persist or begin affecting your wellbeing, speaking to a healthcare professional can help identify the possible reasons for the disruption and identify appropriate support.



CAUSES OF A SLEEP PROBLEM

Sleep problems can develop for many reasons and several factors could be contributing at the same time. Sometimes, worries or changes in our daily life make it harder to switch off at night. In other cases, our health, medication, working hours or sleep environment can affect how well we rest. Understanding what might be disrupting your sleep can help you make practical changes.



1) Mental health and emotional wellbeing

- Stress and anxiety can leave the mind alert at night.
- Worries and racing thoughts make it harder to unwind.
- Low mood can affect both sleep quality and routine.

2) Food, drink and dietary habits

- Caffeine late in the day can delay sleep.
- Alcohol might induce sleepiness, but will reduce quality of sleep.
- Heavy meals before bed may cause indigestion or discomfort.

3) Bedroom environment and comfort

- Street noise, household sounds or light may interrupt sleep.
- An uncomfortable bed might make it harder to settle.
- Room temperature can affect how comfortably you sleep.

4) Medicines and their effects

- Some medicines can cause insomnia or daytime drowsiness.
- Changes in medication might affect your established sleep patterns.
- Stopping or starting medicines can temporarily affect quality of sleep.

5) Age, health and life changes

- Sleep patterns can naturally change as people grow older.
- Menopause and night sweats can make it harder to get restful sleep.
- Physical health conditions and pain might interrupt sleep.

6) Routine, work and activity levels

- Shift work can disrupt the body's natural sleep-wake cycle.
- Irregular bedtimes make it harder to establish a consistent routine.
- A lack of daytime activity might leave your body less prepared for sleep.

Diet and Sleep

What we eat and drink can influence how well we sleep, particularly when our meals are irregular or diet lacks variety. A balanced diet provides the nutrients our bodies need to function properly and support our wellbeing. Eating regular meals and enjoying a variety of foods can help us establish healthy routines. While no single food guarantees a good night's sleep, making thoughtful choices about what we eat can help us sleep better.



Certain foods and drinks can make it harder to settle down at night, particularly when consumed close to bedtime. Caffeine in coffee, tea, chocolate and energy drinks can keep the brain alert for twelve hours or longer. Alcohol may make you feel sleepy initially, but it can disturb sleep later in the night. Large, rich or spicy meals might cause indigestion or discomfort when you're trying to rest.

WHICH FOODS SHOULD YOU EAT?

- **Oily fish:** Provides omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D for reducing inflammation and supporting melatonin synthesis.
- **Bananas:** Offers magnesium and potassium, calming the nervous system and preventing muscle cramps.
- **Nuts and seeds:** Provides a range of nutrients that regulate your internal clock and help produce sleep related hormones.
- **Wholegrains:** Complex carbohydrates and fibre, supports balanced eating and stabilises blood sugar levels.
- **Milk and yoghurt:** Supplies a mix of amino acids and minerals that can calm the nervous system.
- **Leafy green vegetables:** Provides magnesium, folate and other nutrients that improve sleep health.

SOLUTIONS

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene is the everyday habits and routines that help you get a good night's sleep. This includes having a regular bedtime, making your sleep environment comfortable and giving yourself time to unwind before bed.



Small changes can make all the difference which is why it's important to assess your sleep hygiene and see if you can make improvements. By developing consistent sleep habits, we can make it easier to fall asleep, stay asleep and wake up feeling refreshed.

Tips for better sleep hygiene

- ✓ Maintain regular bedtimes and wake times, including weekends where possible.
- ✓ Create a dark, quiet, comfortable sleep environment.
- ✓ Steer clear of phones, tablets and screens an hour before going to bed.
- ✓ Limit caffeine, particularly during the afternoon.
- ✓ Avoid heavy meals and alcohol close to bedtime.
- ✓ Exercise regularly, but don't do vigorous physical activity immediately before bedtime.
- ✓ Try relaxing activities such as reading or bathing before bedtime.
- ✓ Keep televisions and work related activities away from your bedroom environment whenever possible.

VITAMINS & MINERALS

Vitamins, minerals and amino acids play a role in keeping the body healthy and promoting quality sleep. Certain nutrients influence the processes that help regulate sleep, support relaxation and prepare the body for rest. A balanced diet is generally the best way to obtain these nutrients. While supplements are available, they should be carefully considered with a healthcare professional due to their potential for allergic reactions, interactions with other medicines and affect on pregnancies.

Magnesium

- Supports normal nervous system function, which can contribute to relaxation and healthy sleep.
- Magnesium has been associated with sleep quality, although supplementation evidence remains mixed.
- Dietary sources include wholegrains, nuts, seeds, beans and leafy green vegetables.

L-Theanine

- L-Theanine is an amino acid found naturally in tea leaves.
- It has calming properties that may help promote relaxation before bedtime, although caffeine-free teas should be a priority.
- Research suggests L-Theanine may improve some measures of subjective sleep quality, but the evidence is still developing.

Glycine

- Glycine is an amino acid that occurs naturally in the body and is found in meat, beans, fish and dairy products.
- It is thought to help regulate body temperature, a process associated with sleep.
- Some small studies have shown improvements in sleep quality, but further research is needed.

Vitamin D

- Vitamin D is important for many bodily functions, including maintaining healthy bones, muscles and immune function.
- Research has explored a possible link between low levels Vitamin D and sleep difficulties.
- Good dietary sources include oily fish, egg yolks and fortified foods.

Apps that help improve sleep

Calm

Calm combines guided meditation, breathing exercises, relaxing music and sleep stories to help users unwind before bed. Its sleep content is suitable for beginners and includes a wide range of sessions designed to support relaxation and reduce racing thoughts. Additional content is available through subscription plans.

Sleep Cycle

Sleep Cycle focuses on understanding sleep patterns through sleep tracking and sound analysis. Its smart alarm is designed to wake users during a lighter stage of sleep, while sleep insights can help identify patterns in bedtime, waking and sleep quality. The app is initially free with additional features requiring a subscription for full access.

Headspace

Headspace offers a dedicated collection of sleep resources, including guided meditations, sleepcasts, calming sounds and relaxation exercises. These tools help users establish a calming bedtime routine and manage thoughts that make it difficult to settle. A subscription provides full access to its content library and programmes.

Sleepiest

Sleepiest provides bedtime stories, sleep sounds and guided meditation designed to create a relaxing environment at bedtime. Its library includes content for adults and children, while personalised sound combinations can provide consistent background audio. The app offers free content alongside an optional subscription service.

Pzizz

Pzizz uses combinations of music, voiceovers and sound effects, known as dreamscapes, to create personalised audio experiences for sleep and daytime naps. Users can adjust different sound elements to suit their preferences. The app includes free features, with additional content and functions available through its optional subscription service.



SLEEP DIARY



A sleep diary is a simple way to keep track of your sleep habits and how you feel each day. It can capture when you go to bed, when you wake, how long you sleep and how well you slept. By making a few notes each morning, you can gain a better understanding of your sleep patterns.

You might find that stress, late meals or caffeine affects how well you rest. Understanding these patterns can help you make small, actionable improvements. A diary can also provide useful information when discussing your sleep with a healthcare professional, helping them understand your patterns of behaviour.

What can you include in your diary?

- Bedtime, wake time and total hours of sleep.
- How long you think it took to fall asleep.
- How often you woke during the night and the duration.
- Daytime naps, including timing and approximate duration.
- Caffeine, alcohol and nicotine intake.
- Meals and exercise throughout each day.
- Sleep quality, mood and energy levels the following day.

CONSIDERATIONS

MENTAL HEALTH AND SLEEP

Sleep and mental health are closely connected. When we sleep well, the brain processes emotions, stores memories and helps us prepare for the challenges of the following day. However, when we don't get enough sleep, we face an array of problems.

How sleep affects mental health

- **Emotional wellbeing:** A poor night's sleep leaves us feeling irritable, overwhelmed or more sensitive to everyday pressures. When we are well rested, it's often easier to manage our emotions. A good night's sleep can help us remain patient and cope with stressful situations in our daily lives.

- **Concentration and decision making:** Sleep gives the brain time to recover and process information. When we don't get enough rest, concentrating, remembering information and making decisions can become more difficult. This can affect our confidence and ability to manage tasks at work and home.

- **Anxiety and worry:** Worrying or racing thoughts can make it hard to switch off at bedtime, while poor sleep can leave us feeling more anxious the following day. Over time, this can become a difficult cycle, with anxiety disrupting sleep and disrupted sleep causing anxiety.

- **Depression and low mood:** There is a two way relationship between sleep and depression. Poor sleep can worsen a low mood, while depression can change sleep patterns, leaving someone struggling to sleep or sleeping much longer than usual.

- **Social connection:** Sleep affects how people interact with each other. Tiredness and irritability can make social contact feel harder. If this continues, we might withdraw from friends, family or colleagues, potentially increasing feelings of loneliness and isolation.

- **Existing mental health conditions:** For people already experiencing mental health difficulties, poor sleep can make symptoms harder to manage. Sleep deprivation can intensify conditions like anxiety, low mood, mania, psychosis or paranoia, making support and treatment particularly important.



Seasonal Changes

Seasonal changes can affect how well we sleep. During cold weather, lower temperatures makes bedrooms uncomfortable, while shorter daylight hours affects the body's sleep wake rhythm. Keeping your bedroom at a moderate temperature and sticking to a regular bedtime helps you achieve a more consistent sleep schedule throughout the winter months.

In the summer, hot and humid weather can make it harder for the body to cool down before sleep. Our bodies naturally reduce in temperature as we prepare for sleep, but hot weather interferes with this process. Higher temperatures might delay asleep and increase waking during the night. As a result you could feel less rested in the morning or struggle with tiredness during the day.

TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

A few simple adjustments to your bedroom and evening routine can make sleeping more comfortable throughout the year.

- **Keep rooms cool:** Close curtains during hot days.
- **Choose breathable bedding:** Use lightweight cotton or linen.
- **Stay warm:** Use suitable bedding during colder weather.
- **Maintain routines:** Keep consistent bedtimes and wake times.
- **Manage evening light:** Reduce bright artificial light.
- **Control body temperature:** Avoid strenuous exercise before bed.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

Sleep and fatigue have a big impact on workplace safety, which is why it's so important for employers to be proactive when it comes to rest. So what can managers do to make their workplace sleep safe?

Manage shift patterns

Employers should regularly review rotas, overtime and the length of shifts to make sure workers have enough time to rest and recover.

Protect rest periods

Time away from work should give employees a genuine opportunity to switch off. Avoid unnecessary contact or work demands during scheduled time away from work.

Support night workers

Introduce health surveillance for night workers, particularly where employees report sleep difficulties, fatigue or health concerns linked to shift work.

Improve awareness

Train managers to recognise the signs of fatigue and provide appropriate support. Encourage supportive conversations rather than treating tiredness as an individual failing.

Provide sleep education

Give workers practical information about sleep, sleep hygiene and fatigue management. Signpost resources and explain what support is available.

Review workplace policies

Review policies covering overtime, shift swapping, remote working and flexible working. Setting clear expectations for availability outside working hours reduces conflict.

Encourage employees to speak up

Create a supportive culture where workers can speak up about sleep difficulties without fear of blame. Use feedback to identify patterns and improve working arrangements.





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