

Training module 6

Coping with sleep problems

In this module you will:

- Learn about sleep and sleeping problems
- Identify if you have a sleeping problem
- Monitor your sleep with a sleep diary
- Learn solutions to different types of sleep problems
- Work out a sleep improvement action plan.

Training module 6: Coping with sleep problems

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Part A: Description of module

How can this module help me?

The purpose of this module is to provide information and help if you struggle to get enough good sleep. The module is broken down into five sections:

1. Information on sleep and sleep problems
2. Help to decide what type of sleep problem you have and how it affects you
3. Considers the various causes of sleep problems
4. Considers solutions to these sleep problems
5. Action plan to help you address your sleep problem

Throughout this module when we talk about 'sleep problems' we mean problems getting enough good sleep. This is also sometimes referred to as 'insomnia'. If you are suffering from lack of sleep for whatever reason, then some of the suggestions in this module might help.

There are a number of clinical sleep disorders which exist such as sleep apnoea (stops in breathing during sleep), narcolepsy (suddenly falling asleep at inappropriate times) and restless legs syndrome (an irresistible urge to move legs). Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this module to consider these medical disorders directly. If you think your sleeping problem may have a medical cause it is important that you discuss this with your GP who should be able to help.

How does this module work?

Throughout the module there are different coloured boxes:

Top tips



The purple 'Top tips' boxes give you useful advice or information on sleep.

Action box



The blue 'Action' boxes direct you to a specific exercise, like completing a checklist or keeping a sleep diary.

Checklist



The yellow boxes ask you to complete a checklist

Part B: Sleep and sleeping problems

Why do we sleep?

During sleep, our bodies are working to maintain physical and mental health. Sleep is important as it allows our bodies to be restored for the following day. It plays a role in many of our functions, from healing and stimulating growth to processing memories. This is why we feel refreshed and energised after a good night's sleep.

Our bodies have a natural body clock which influences our sleep-wake pattern, and our sleepiness peaks at between 12am and 6am. It is suggested that most adults require about eight hours of sleep a night; however, this varies from person to person. Having both a good *quality* and good *duration* of sleep is important for us to function effectively. Put simply, the **amount of sleep you need is the amount which means that you don't feel sleepy the next day.**

What happens when we sleep?

Whilst asleep, we go through a specific cycle. The complete cycle lasts about 90 minutes, and is repeated throughout the night.

Stage 1 – Light sleep:

At this stage we are half awake and half asleep, still quite alert and easily awakened.

Stage 2 – True sleep:

At this stage we become disengaged from our surroundings and our heart rate and breathing slows. This stage accounts for the largest part of our sleep.

Stage 3 – Deep sleep:

This is the restorative part of our sleep where our body heals. Our heart rate and breathing are at their lowest and muscle activity is limited. If we are disturbed in deep sleep then we are more likely to feel groggy and disorientated.

Stage 4 – REM sleep:

REM stands for rapid eye movement. During this stage, although we are not conscious, our brain is very active. Most dreams occur in this stage (which is why our eyes dart around) and we also process memories. After REM sleep we go back to stage 1 and repeat the process.

What would happen if we didn't sleep?

Lack of sleep can have a negative effect on our health and wellbeing. Insufficient sleep impacts on our brain function which can cause negative feelings and emotions, and impact on our ability to carry out tasks. In some situations it may put us more at risk as we are more likely to make bad decisions or be unaware of a danger.

Most of us have experienced a bad night's sleep and understand the impact this can have on the following day, often causing irritability, lack of concentration, and forgetfulness. This demonstrates that even a small lack of sleep can affect our abilities. When poor sleep continues over a long period of time the effects can have a greater influence on us both physically and mentally; impacting on our health and daily living. It can begin to affect all aspects of our lives such as relationships, work, emotional stability, and our behaviours. This long-term lack of sleep is known as 'sleep debt'.

What is a sleeping problem?

Many of us experience occasional problems with our sleep. A sleeping problem is when we have difficulties getting either the right amount or the right quality of sleep. This could be due to problems getting to sleep or waking during the night. Sometimes, once a problem has been experienced with sleep, the fear of this continuing can be a problem in itself.

The symptoms of sleeping problems can be quite subtle to start with. The longer the issue goes on, the worse the effect. When we are able to continue to function without sufficient sleep, it does not mean that it is ok to have less sleep, but likely we are not performing at our best. After suffering from a sleeping problem for a period of time, it can be difficult to remember how it feels to be fully rested. Sleeping problems are not uncommon and there are many ways in which they can be addressed.

What are the different types of sleeping problems?

Broadly speaking, sleeping problems can be broken down into two categories:

- **Problems with duration of sleep**

For example, if we are struggling to get to sleep or are not allowing ourselves enough time to sleep, then even if our sleep quality is good we will not be getting enough of it for our bodies to function properly.

- **Problems with quality of sleep**

If we are getting the correct number of hours of sleep but are disturbed throughout the night then it is likely that our quality of sleep is poor. This means the body will not be able to restore and re-energise sufficiently, leaving us feeling tired the next day.

Exercise



On the next page is a sheet which describes some typical sleep problems and some common effects of sleep problems. Try reading the sheet and ticking those boxes that apply to you.

Have I got a sleeping problem?

Types of sleep problems	Does it apply to me?		
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely/never
I have difficulty falling asleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wake up during the night and can't go back to sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wake up earlier in the morning than I would like to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I lie awake for half an hour or more before I fall asleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel sleepy and struggle to remain alert during the day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My sleep pattern is inverted – I sleep during the day and am awake at night.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I struggle to get up in the morning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe below):			

Effects of sleep problems	Does it apply to me?		
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely/never
I am irritable/I tend to row with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find it hard to concentrate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am exhausted/have a lack of energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I worry about going to sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I keep forgetting things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel sad or depressed because I can't sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I catch up on sleep during the day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have difficulty controlling my emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe below):			

In all likelihood, if you are reading this module, you are doing so because you think you may have some kind of sleep problem. By completing the sheet on the previous page, you should hopefully have some idea as to the nature of your sleep problem and also the effect it is having on you. It would be helpful at this stage to find out more about your sleeping, and for this we need a sleep diary.

The purpose of a sleep diary is to help you to monitor the amount of sleep you are actually getting and any difficulties you might experience in sleeping. In keeping an accurate record over a period of time, it should help you to identify any patterns that occur with your sleep problem.

Exercise



On the next page is a 'sleep diary' to help you keep track of your sleeping. Try completing the diary for one week.

Daily Sleep Diary

Please complete this sleep diary each morning for one week. The answers you give don't have to be exactly right – just try and give your best estimate.

		Night 1	Night 2	Night 3	Night 4	Night 5	Night 6	Night 7
1	What time did you go to bed last night?							
2	How long did it take you to get to sleep?							
3	How many times did you wake up in the night?							
4	How long were you awake during the night in total ?							
5	When did you finally wake up?							
6	When did you get up?							
7	How many hours sleep did you get in total last night?							
8	How much caffeine did you have after 5.00pm last night? (coffee, tea, cola and energy drinks all contain caffeine)							
9	Did you sleep at all during the previous day?							
10	Had anything yesterday made you anxious or stressed?							
11	Did anything else disturb your sleep last night (e.g. noise)?							
12	How would you rate the quality of your sleep last night? 1 2 3 4 5 Very poor → Reasonable → Very good							

Part C: The causes of sleep problems

If you have completed your sleep diary for a week it is worth taking some time to look at what you have recorded and to see if there are any patterns to your sleep problem. You might find it helpful to sit down with your keyworker and discuss your sleep diary to help you to identify any patterns. Examples of patterns might be:

- You sleep better the earlier you go to bed
- You sleep worse at night if you nap during the day
- Sleep is affected by the amount of caffeine you drink
- You sleep less if you oversleep the day before
- Quality of sleep decreases the more stressed you feel

These are just examples of some possible patterns, but they may not be true for you. Just go through your diary and see what patterns you can identify. Once you have identified these problem patterns, you can then do something to change them and hopefully improve your sleep

Before we start to look at solutions to sleeping problems, however, it is worth looking briefly at some of the more common causes of sleep problems.

What Causes Sleep Problems?

The causes of sleep problems can broadly be broken down into four groups listed below. The different groups have been colour coded to make referring to the sections a little easier and we will use these colours through the rest of this module.

1. Mental

2. Physical

3. Behavioural

4. Environmental

We will now look at each of these in turn.

1. Mental:

Depression

Depression can make it difficult for us to face day-to-day responsibilities and can sometimes lead us to sleep more in order to avoid them. This can eventually lead to a situation where we are sleeping in late or sleeping during the day. As a result, we can then find it difficult to sleep at night and end up with an inverted sleep pattern, where we are awake at night and sleep during the day. In addition, if depression also causes troubling or difficult thoughts, then this in itself can make it hard to get to sleep.

Stress, worry and anxiety

Stress, worry and anxiety can seriously affect our ability to relax and so get to sleep. Life events such as changing jobs, moving home, or money worries can keep us awake and may even cause nightmares.

Thinking styles

Thinking styles themselves can cause problems with sleep. If you have had difficulty sleeping for some time, then this can lead to thoughts like "I'll never get to sleep!" These very thoughts can cause the stress which means that we don't get a good night's sleep. It can be cycle that is hard to break; our anxiety about not getting enough sleep causes us to stay awake which just makes us even more anxious. Alternatively, you may have a very active mind which struggles to switch off at night.

Trauma

Trauma can cause nightmares or night terrors meaning disturbed sleep. Fear of reliving traumatic events can increase anxiety around sleep, worsening the issue.

Mania

Feelings of energy and elation can mean that we do not feel tired and so do not want to sleep. Rapid thoughts can also make it hard to fall asleep.

Top tips



Some prescribed medication can make you drowsy as a side effect. This is not necessarily an indication that you need to sleep. If you sleep during the day, then you may well find it difficult to go to sleep at night. If you take medication which makes you feel drowsy, you might want to consider going for a walk to combat the drowsiness. If you feel you must sleep during the day, try and make it as early in the day as possible so you give yourself enough time to get tired again before bed.

2. Physical:

Physical illness and pain

There are a number of health complaints where tiredness is one of the symptoms. It is beyond the scope of this module to look at these illnesses, but if you think that your sleeping problem may have a medical cause, it is very important that you discuss this with your GP. Pain or discomfort can also make it difficult to find a comfortable sleeping position and can make it very difficult to get to sleep.

Stimulants

Caffeine and nicotine are both stimulants. If you drink coffee, cola or energy drinks or if you smoke shortly before going to bed, then these will act as a stimulant, meaning your brain remains active when you are trying to sleep.

Alcohol

Although alcohol might make it easier to fall asleep, the quality of sleep you get is poor as the body will be working through the night trying to process the alcohol. As a result, you can wake up having slept for eight hours, but still feel tired (or worse).

Street drugs

Drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy or amphetamines are all stimulants. As well as being illegal and dangerous, they will also damage your ability to sleep.

Medication

Some medication can cause sleeping difficulties, for example some anti-depressants. Equally, stopping some psychiatric medications can also cause sleeping problems.

Top tips



Some people believe that cannabis helps sleep. There has been little research into this and so there is no evidence that cannabis does actually help sleep. It is known that low doses of cannabis might have a sedative effect, but moderate doses can act as a stimulant, large doses as a psychedelic and very large doses can cause psychotic-like symptoms. In short, taking cannabis is quite a gamble. Not only is it illegal, but you can never be sure how strong the cannabis you are taking is and so what effect it might have. Taking cannabis to help sleep should therefore be avoided – natural sleep is always preferable to sleep which is induced by drugs of any kind.

3. Behavioural:

Lack of bedtime routine:

Lack of bedtime routine can cause issues with sleep. For example, not allowing time to wind down before you go to bed can mean that your mind is still too active to sleep. Similarly, if the time you go to bed changes regularly, then your mind and body will not settle into a routine which might make it difficult for you to get to sleep.

Not allowing enough time:

It might sound obvious, but a common cause of sleep problems is not giving enough time for sleep. Not going to bed at a reasonable hour when we have to be up early the next day will absolutely guarantee that we don't get enough sleep that night. If we repeat this over a period of weeks, then it is going to cause us a problem.

Associations:

We are creatures of habit. If your mind associates going to bed with reading a relaxing book and then falling asleep, then the very act of getting in to bed will help your mind to relax and for you to fall asleep. If, on the other hand, you tend to lie in bed reading work emails or watching TV programmes that make you tense, then your mind will not link getting in to bed with relaxing.

Top tips



Don't forget – although some routines may help you to sleep, there are other routines which do exactly the opposite. Routines like smoking or drinking coffee just before bed will very likely be harmful to sleep.

4. Environmental

Light:

Having too much light enter your room at night can affect sleep. Ideally your bedroom will be dark throughout the night. Equally, it is important that you expose yourself to enough daylight during the day so that your body clock is properly set.

Temperature:

Being too hot or cold during the night may cause you to wake.

Noise:

Too much noise or a repetitive noise will create a difficult environment to relax and may hinder sleep.

Comfort:

An uncomfortable bed may cause issues during the night and could even cause physical problems.

Clutter:

For some people, a cluttered or untidy bedroom can make it difficult for them to relax and fall asleep.

Top tips



It is best to avoid the light from mobile phones, laptops and tablets when you go to bed. The light from these devices is referred to as 'blue light' as it is on the blue wavelength. This light boosts attention and reaction times and is particularly harmful to sleep. It is therefore best to turn these devices off once you go to bed.

Exercise



The next page lists the common causes for sleeping problems. Go through the list and tick those boxes which you think apply to you. The column on the right-hand side refers you to different sections of this module which gives advice which might help you tackle your sleep problem.

What are the causes of *my* sleep problem?

Cause of sleep problem (tick as many as are relevant to you)		Is this relevant to me?		For suggested solutions, please refer to the pages listed
		Yes	No	
Mental	Depression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pages 14-16
	Stress, worry or anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Thinking styles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Mania	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Physical	Illness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pages 17-18
	Pain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Stimulants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Street drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Behavioural	No bedtime routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pages 19-20
	Not allowing time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Associations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Environmental	Light	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pages 21-22
	Temperature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Noise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Clutter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Once you have completed the sheet above, please refer to the relevant sections indicated for suggested solutions to the problem.

Part D: Solutions to sleep problems

1. Mental:

Relaxation techniques

If your sleep problems are brought about by stress, worry or anxiety, then you might benefit from trying out a relaxation technique before you go to bed. There are many different types of relaxation technique. We will consider three of the more popular ones, but there are many other different types which may work for you such as relaxation yoga. If you would like more information on relaxation techniques, some links are provided in Part F of this module.

Relaxation techniques:

- i. Controlled breathing
- ii. Meditation
- iii. Visualisation

You can use these techniques to help you relax before going to bed, but you can equally use them if you wake up during the night and struggle to get back to sleep. All the exercises can be done lying down.

i. Controlled breathing:

Controlled breathing focuses on slowing our breathing down. When we are stressed or anxious our breathing often becomes more rapid. Using breathing exercises can slow breathing down and help to control these feelings. Try this simple breathing exercise:

1. Get into a comfortable position
2. Breathe in for three seconds (counting one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand etc)
3. Hold your breath for two seconds
4. Breathe out for four seconds
5. Repeat action for a few minutes
6. If you feel discomfort at any time, stop the exercise

ii. Meditation:

Meditation is a useful tool in relaxation before sleep. There are numerous meditation techniques that you can try, and we provide some links to these at the end of this module. One of the most common meditation techniques focusses on relaxing your body (sometimes called the 'body scan'):

1. Get into a comfortable position
2. Close your eyes
3. Consciously focus on your body, starting at the top of your head
4. Gradually move your awareness down your body, from your head to your neck, then shoulders, chest, arms, fingers, back, hips, legs and toes
5. As you focus on each part of your body, gently flex and then relax the muscles
6. Take your time doing this – there's no rush. The body scan can take five minutes or 30 minutes – it's entirely up to you.

iii. Visualisation:

Visualisation is the act of imagining yourself in a peaceful environment – a place that makes you feel happy and relaxed. This might be a real place or one that is imaginary. It might be a place where you spent a happy holiday, or it might be your perfect woodland walk. By visualising this place, you can calm your body and mind and make it easier for you to sleep:

1. Decide on your chosen visualisation
2. Make yourself comfortable – you can sit or lie down
3. Close your eyes and start your visualisation
4. Focus on your senses – what do you hear, see, smell and touch?
5. If anxious thoughts come, acknowledge them but try and then put them gently to one side and return to your visualisation
6. Try and repeat this process regularly – ideally every day. Just remember that it might not work first time – the benefits increase the more you do it.

Dealing with an overactive mind

Sometimes thoughts race through our head when we go to bed and prevent us from falling asleep. Rather than trying to solve all of your problems at a time when you are at your most tired, it is best to try and distract your mind so that you can switch off and get some sleep. You can then return to the issues in the morning, refreshed and more able to cope. The aim of distraction techniques is to occupy your mind just enough so that it prevents anxious or worrying thoughts, whilst leaving the mind calm enough to fall asleep. Below are some suggested distraction techniques. Not all of them will work for everybody, but see which ones work for you. You might need to tweak the techniques a bit so that they suit you – feel free to be creative:

- Try counting backwards in your head from 99 to 1. Breathe in and then out for each number. If you lose track of the number, just start again at 99. Gradually, the act of thinking of the next number should drive away other thoughts.
- Try to remember the people who were in your class when you were at school.
- Count your breaths, slowly and consciously. Count one for each in breath and one for each out breath.
- Rather than trying to make yourself go to sleep try doing the opposite. Try to keep your eyes open and resist closing them or going to sleep. This resistance often increases sleepiness.
- Play some gentle music and listen to it carefully. Try to visualise the music and the instruments that are playing.
- Before you go to bed, write down all the things that are on your mind and tasks that you need to complete. Make a commitment to leave them until the next day.
- If you struggle with unwanted thoughts or anxieties then consider keeping a pad of paper and pen by your bed. When a thought comes into your mind, write it on the pad and then try and let it go for the time being. You can return to the pad the next day and address any of the issues you have written down with a clear, well rested head.

Talking

Rather than keeping your worries and anxieties inside, try talking to someone about them. Talking through these worries might help you to stop thinking about them at night. You can approach a friend, family member or your keyworker to discuss the matter that is worrying you – they can offer you support, encouragement and perhaps some suggestions. If you don't feel like you have anyone you can talk to then there are helplines that you could use (please see section F of this module).

Problem Solving

Sometimes our sleep can be disturbed because something specific is troubling us. It might be that we are worried about something like work, money or a relationship. Transform has a training module called "Problem solving and goal achievement" to help you work through a specific problem you may be experiencing. You might find it helpful to work through the module with your keyworker. Alternatively, we have a simple sheet you can complete which takes you through the key stages of considering a problem, identifying possible solutions and then deciding on a course of action. A copy of the sheet is attached to the end of this module.

Top tips



If you wake up in the night it can be very stressful just trying to get back to sleep. The very act of trying to force yourself to sleep can have the exact opposite effect and just serve to keep you awake. If you can't get back to sleep in about 20 minutes, try engaging in a quiet, restful activity. You might read a book or listen to some soothing music. Keep the lights dim whilst you do this and when you feel your eyelids are getting heavy, try and fall asleep again.

2. Physical:

What you eat

What you eat can have a real impact both on your health and on the quality of your sleep.

- Eating a balanced and nutritious diet has a positive impact on both physical and mental health. This includes sleep.
- Avoid large meals soon before you go to bed. Try to eat about three hours before going to bed. Eating soon before you go to bed will make it more difficult to get to sleep.
- If you get hungry at night, snack on foods that (in your experience) won't disturb your sleep, perhaps dairy foods, carbohydrates or fruit.
- Cut back on fatty foods or foods with high sugar content. These can be replaced with other healthier snacks and food.
- Ensure you are having a balanced diet. Lacking in certain minerals and nutrients can contribute to certain sleeping problems or cause physical difficulties that prevent sleep.
- Certain foods help trigger the production of melatonin which aids sleep. Foods such as yogurt, milk, oats, bananas, poultry, eggs, peanuts and tuna are worth considering.

What you drink

- As any coffee lover knows, caffeine is a stimulant that can keep you awake. So avoid caffeine (found in coffee, tea, cola and energy drinks) for about four hours before going to bed. Consider drinking de-caffeinated coffee instead. Energy drinks in particular can often contain very high levels of caffeine and are specifically designed to stimulate. It is best to avoid drinks if you have difficulty sleeping.
- Avoid alcohol soon before bed, or excessive drinking at any time. It may feel as though alcohol makes you sleepier, however your body will be working to process the alcohol throughout the night meaning disturbed and poor-quality sleep.
- Consider having a warm, milky drink or a herbal tea (caffeine free) before going to bed. This can be soothing and part of your bedtime ritual, setting your mind and body up for sleep.
- Ensure you are having enough liquids during the day to stay hydrated. Drinking a lot just before you go to bed may mean you wake in the night to go to the toilet, so try drinking earlier in the evening.
- Go to the toilet to empty your bladder just before going to bed.
- If you tend to wake up in the night thirsty, keep a bottle of water by your bed. This will save you having to get up and turn a light on, which could make it difficult to get back to sleep.

Exercise

Exercising and being active can tire us out physically and mentally, making it easier for us to sleep. Equally, if we are inactive during the day, then our bodies will not be tired when we go to bed. A few points to remember are:

- Keeping active and getting fresh air will help you get a better night's sleep.
- Exercise helps to relieve stress that may have built up over the day.
- If you have no activities planned for the day then try going out for a short walk or do some other gentle exercise. Even light exercise has been shown to be effective in improving sleep.

GP and Medications

If you have tried to tackle your sleeping problem yourself but the problem has remained, then you may need additional help from your GP:

- If you feel that your sleeping problem may be caused by medication you are taking your GP may be able to change your dose, trial you on a different medication, or suggest other treatments. It is very important that you don't just stop taking the medication – discuss it with your GP first and don't forget to inform your keyworker of any changes to your medication.
- If you think your sleep problem may have a medical cause (for example a physical illness which is making you tired) then it is best to discuss this with your GP.
- If your sleep problem is particularly severe or long standing, you may want to see your GP to see if they can refer you to a sleep clinic or for cognitive behavioural therapy.

Sleeping tablets

If other measures have been tried and have been unsuccessful your GP may prescribe sleeping tablets. Sleeping tablets tend only to be prescribed as a last resort once all other avenues have been explored. Although sleeping tablets can be helpful for some people, there are some distinct downsides which are important to note:

- Sleeping tablets tend only to be effective as a solution to a sleeping problem for a short period of time – up to about four weeks maximum. As a result, they are not a long-term solution to a sleep problem – they are solely a short-term intervention.
- Sleeping tablets tend to lose their effect after four weeks as your body gets used to them. What this also means is that you can become psychologically dependent on sleeping tablets if you take them for more than four weeks.
- Because of the risk of dependency, anybody with a history of drug or alcohol dependency should be very careful before taking any sleeping tablets.
- Sleeping tablets in themselves do not necessarily solve a sleep problem. Once the course of tablets ends, whatever was causing the sleep problem is likely to still be there. It is much better to try and find a long-term solution to a sleep problem by identifying the cause and then making lifestyle changes, like those described in this module.

3. Behavioural:

It really does help to have an established routine when you go to bed so that your body and mind start to associate your routine with winding down. Below are a few suggestions to help you set up a healthy bedtime routine.

Winding down before bed

Take some time to calm your body and mind before you go to bed as part of your routine. There are many examples of relaxing activities, but just to give you some ideas you might want to consider:

Reading:

Incorporating this into your daily bedtime routine will help to distract from any worries about going to bed and may help you relax. You could also consider listening to some audiobooks to help you get to sleep.

Music:

Listen to calming music. Avoid listening to very loud or rapid music. You might want to listen to a relaxation therapy CD which are readily available to purchase online. Try and make this part of your regular evening routine.

Watch your favourite TV show:

Try and avoid watching any programmes or movies which are likely to make you feel tense – the aim is to help you relax!

Have a bath:

The rise and fall in body temperature promotes drowsiness and makes you feel relaxed.

Walking:

Take a short, relaxing walk and get some fresh air.

Herbal tea:

Drink a herbal tea like camomile before going to bed. Make sure there is no caffeine in the tea.

Hobbies

You might want to consider starting up a hobby which you can focus on in the evening before going to bed. Ideally choose a quiet, peaceful hobby that helps you to relax and unwind at the end of the day. You might want to consider:

- Creative writing
- Keeping a diary
- Drawing or painting
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Colouring books
- Knitting, sewing or crafting

Bedtime routine

Establishing a routine will help your body associate certain times of the day with sleeping and waking. To help establish a routine you might want to consider the following techniques:

- Go to bed at the time you normally expect to fall asleep.
- Keep the time that you go to bed as regular as possible.
- Build a relaxation technique into your bedtime routine. Consider using the 'Controlled Breathing', 'Meditation' or 'Visualisation' exercises which are described on pages 14-15 of this module.
- Make sure you give yourself enough time to sleep. The average person needs about eight hours sleep each night, so you need to give yourself at least this much time between going to bed and getting up the next day.

Waking up

Just as it is important to have a routine for going to bed, it is also useful to have a routine for getting up:

- Make sure you set an alarm to get yourself up at a suitable time. Ideally get up around the same time every day to help your mind and body get into a routine.
- Give yourself plenty of time to wake up gently. If you leave barely enough time to get up and get going you will start the day flustered and stressed.
- Once you are fully awake, avoid lying in bed for long periods. You want to associate your bed with sleeping rather than lying awake.
- Make sure you re-hydrate with a glass of water and try and leave time for breakfast – this should set you up well for the day ahead.

4. Environmental:

Suitable environment:

Having a restful and comfortable sleeping environment is crucial. If you think that your environment is having a negative impact on your sleeping, try and focus on making changes to help you sleep.

Light:

Having a dark bedroom is crucial to getting a good night's sleep. Darkness helps your body produce melatonin which promotes restful sleep.

- Ensure that you have curtains or blinds that cover your windows. If your room is still too light even with curtains pulled (this can be a particular problem for people who work at night) then consider using a sleep mask. They are easy to get hold of and relatively inexpensive.
- Avoid having bright lights on in your bedroom close to the time you will be going to bed as bright lights can stimulate your internal clock. Try having a more mellow bedside lamp available.
- Switch off any devices with screens that are lit – for example computers, phones, tablets and so on. As has been mentioned, the 'blue light' from these devices is particularly harmful to sleep.
- Make sure you get plenty of natural light during the day. This will help your body clock to set itself.

Noise:

Make sure your bedroom is as quiet as possible. There will always be some noises, particularly if you are living in a shared house, but there are still some things you can do to keep noise levels down:

- If you have mobile devices which sound an alert when you receive a message, then turn the sound off when you go to bed.
- If you experience noise from the street or from neighbours, try keeping your window shut (assuming it isn't too hot).
- Move any items that make noise from your bedroom or switch them off to avoid disturbance in the night.
- It might sound strange, but if you are particularly sensitive to noises at night one solution is to block out the sound with another sound of your choosing. This is called 'white noise' – it might be some relaxing music, or the sound of nature played from a CD. The idea is that the sound is quiet and neutral enough not to prevent you from sleeping, but which hides other distracting noises (for example, the annoying sound of a boiler or fridge). Make sure, however, that any noise doesn't disturb others.

Temperature:

Try to keep the temperature in your room at a comfortable level for you – neither too hot nor too cold. We each like different temperatures when we sleep, so this is very much down to personal taste.

- If you notice that you are feeling cold in the night then add an extra duvet or use a duvet with a higher 'tog' rating.
- If you are too hot in the night then remove duvets or sheets or open a window. If you really suffer with heat in the summer you might want to consider investing in a small fan for your bedroom.
- Use a hot water bottle or socks if your feet get cold.

Comfort:

Having a comfortable bed and pillows makes a big difference to how you sleep at night. If you find your mattress uncomfortable or wake in the morning with aches, then try turning it over – sometimes mattresses wear unevenly, making it uncomfortable.

Tidiness:

Keep your bedroom clean and tidy. This will give you a better environment to sleep in. If possible keep clutter out of your room and keep your bed tidy.

Top tips



If you are struggling to fall asleep or if you wake up in the night, then staring at the time often only makes matters worse and increases stress. When you go to bed, try turning the clock face away from you

Part E: Applying the solutions

So far in this module we have looked at different types of sleeping problems and what your specific sleeping problem is. We have then looked at what may be the causes of your sleep problem and we have considered a variety of possible solutions.

It is now up to you to decide which of the solutions you think are most likely to help you sleep. Go through the list of possible solutions and then write below what actions you are going to take to try and improve your sleeping. Don't forget – the solutions listed are just suggestions. If you think of any other ideas which might help you sleep, then please write these down in your action plan.

Sleep improvement action plan

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Exercise



Carry out your action plan and review the impact it is having on your sleep. You might find it helpful to complete a new sleep diary after a few weeks to help you assess if you are getting more sleep.

If you find that your sleep has still not improved even after you have carried out your action plan, you might want to complete the checklist on the next page just to make sure you haven't missed anything. If you tick 'no' to any of the sections, it might be worth giving it a try.

Action checklist

Action to improve my sleep		Have I tried this yet?	
		Yes	No
1	Setting up a regular sleep routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Ensuring my bedroom is comfortable:		
	▪ Dark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Undisturbed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Correct temperature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Comfortable bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Trying relaxation techniques regularly before bed:		
	▪ Breathing exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Visualisation exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Meditation exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Winding down before bed:		
	▪ Trying relaxing activities like reading or listening to music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Avoiding stressful or stimulating activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Having a healthy and regular 'wake up' routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Getting regular exercise/being active during the day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Eating a healthy diet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Avoiding stimulants like coffee for four hours before bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Keeping a sleep diary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Tackling any issues which might have been causing stress or preventing sleep (completing problem solving sheet)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Talking to people/offloading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Using the support of my GP:		
	▪ Asking my GP for a referral to a sleep clinic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Talking to my GP to eliminate a possible physical cause	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	▪ Reviewing medication with my GP	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked 'No' to any of the above, you might want to consider adding this to your 'Sleep improvement action plan'

Part F: Further information

1. Samaritans offer confidential emotional support 24 hours a day. They can be contacted on:
 - Phone: 08457 909090
 - Web site: <http://www.samaritans.org>

2. For information online about sleep problems, visit:
 - <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/sleep/Pages/sleep-home.aspx>

3. There are numerous guided meditations available on YouTube. There are also guided meditation apps available for Android and Apple devices. Finally, there are many internet sites which address this issue also. A link to one such site is below – it provides a few useful examples of meditation techniques to help you sleep:
 - <http://www.wikihow.com/Meditate-to-Get-to-Sleep>

4. NHS have produced a booklet on relaxation. Toward the end of the booklet there are a number of meditation and relaxation exercises which you can work through. Visit:
 - http://firststeps-surrey.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Relaxation_booklet.pdf

5. Moodjuice produces a range of free audio self-help guides including:
 - Relaxation exercises
 - Visualisation exercises
 - Progressive muscular relaxation

To access any of these, visit:

- <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/asppodcast.asp>

Part G: Appendix

Problem Solving – side 1

Please write the problem you would like to overcome below:

	List possible solutions below		Advantages	Disadvantages
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Based on the advantages and disadvantages identified, write your chosen solution below:

Problem Solving – side 2

Based on your chosen solution, state your goal in as few words as possible. *My goal is to:*

Why do you want to reach this goal? *This goal is important because:*

Steps to achieve my goal

	Describe action required	What help or resources do I need?	Date to achieve by	Tick when action completed
Step 1				<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 2				<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 3				<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 4				<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 5				<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 6				<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 7				<input type="checkbox"/>