

Including a Question & Answer section with award-winning health writer and GP, Dr Sarah Brewer



Just about everyone experiences sleep problems at some time during their life – often when they're feeling worried or stressed. In some cases sleep disturbances may only last a few days (eg jetlag, worry about a job interview or driving test) but sometimes it can last a few weeks (eg exam stress) or become a long-term condition that interferes with your quality of life.

### What is sleep disturbance?

Sleep disturbance is the perception of difficulty falling asleep, or in maintaining an adequate amount of sleep. You may wake up earlier than you would like, and the sleep you do achieve is not refreshing. Surveys suggest as many as one in three people is affected.



### Did you know?

Sleep is a form of unconsciousness in which some parts of the brain switch off, but others become more active.

Sleep is so essential for your physical and mental well-being that you spend around a third of your life in bed! While you are asleep:

- Your brain processes information, memory and experiences
- Your muscles and joints recover from constant use during the day
- You produce increased amounts of growth hormone
- Protein in all parts of your body is replenished faster than when you are awake
- Your production of skin cells, red blood cells and immune cells increases
   Achieving just the right amount of sleep is therefore important for long-term good health and well-being.

# Why Lack of Sleep is an Important Problem

Lack of sleep has a significant effect on your quality of life. When you suffer from sleep disturbance, you wake up feeling tired and irritable, and may not feel that you are performing at your best.

For most adults, sleeping for 7 to 8 hours duration is ideal. The main result of sleep loss is excessive daytime sleepiness, but you may also experience low mood, poor memory and concentration.



### Time to Press the Snooze Button...

**Top Sleeping Tips** Sleep difficulties are often associated with anxiety and, in

turn, lack of sleep makes anxiety worse. This chicken-andegg scenario means it's often difficult to know which problem came first. Luckily, taking steps to reduce anxiety can help your sleep quality improve - and vice versa.



Some people find a warm, milky drink before bed helps them relax - hot milk with cinnamon or nutmeg is better than cocoa-based drinks that contain some caffeine. But avoid late drinks if you regularly wake at night to visit the bathroom - a full bladder is guaranteed to disturb your rest.

If menopausal hot flushes and night sweats wake you, keep a fan in your room to cool you down; top your bed with layers (sheet and duvet, or sheet and blankets) so you can quickly reduce your coverings. Herbal remedies such as those containing Black Cohosh have been used to help reduce menopausal symptoms, too. MenoHerb® is a traditional herbal medicinal product used for the relief of symptoms of the menopause, such as hot flushes, night sweats, and temporary changes in mood exclusively based upon long-standing use

as a traditional remedy. Always read the label. Take a relaxing herbal remedy combination, such as Valerian Root plus Passion Flower extracts, half an hour before bedtime. These herbs are traditionally used for the temporary relief of sleep disturbances due to symptoms of mild anxiety, based on traditional use only.



Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and a comfortable temperature. Switch off all lights, and fully draw the curtains, which should be well-lined to block out all light. You may need an additional black-out blind during summer. 18 to 22°C is ideal.

(such as nervous irritability and restlessness),

# **Traditional** Herbal **Sleep Aids**

Several plants have a long history of use as traditional herbal medicines to help reduce anxiety and promote sleep, such as Valerian and Passion Flower.



### Did you know?

used to make perfume

**Valerian** is a pretty herb with pink or white flowers that grows wild throughout Europe and Asia. Its roots are traditionally used for the temporary relief of sleep disturbances due to symptoms of mild anxiety. It is reported to have positive effects on sleep structure, helping you slip more quickly down into the deeper levels of slow-wave sleep. As a result, Valerian helps keep you asleep and allows you to wake up refreshed and ready to face the day ahead.



# Did you know?

Passion Flower is a climbing vine native to North America. Its large, intricate purple-white flowers are followed by delicious passion fruits. The dried aerial parts of the Passion Flower have traditionally been used for the relief of symptoms associated with stress, such as mild anxiety and sleep problems associated with an overactive mind (when unwanted thoughts go round and round). It has a calming effect, reducing tenseness, restlessness and irritability with difficulty in falling asleep.

effect has worn off. Take regular exercise, but avoid strenuous activity late in the evening.

need for sleep at night.

Eat a light meal in the early evening: otherwise hunger - a primitive alerting response - can stop you sleeping.

Take time to unwind from the stresses of the day before going to bed - read a book, listen to soothing music or have a candle lit bath.

Try to avoid day-time naps, which reduce your

Steer clear of substances that interfere with sleep

such as caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Although

alcohol may help you fall asleep initially, you are

likely to have a disturbed sleep once the drugged

If something is worrying you write it down and promise yourself you'll deal with it in the morning - don't take worries to bed with you.

# Sleeping Tablets versus Herbal Sleep Aids

Doctors are advised to only prescribe sleeping tablets if other non-drug therapies have not worked. Even so, according to NHS Choices over 10 million prescriptions are written for sleeping tablets each year in England alone. Benzodiazepines or the newer 'Z' class drugs are the preferred options, but both types work in a similar way. That means that if one doesn't work, simply swapping to another is unlikely to have a different effect.

Like all medicines, sleeping tablets can have side effects. Everyone's reaction to a drug is different, but those most commonly reported include: feeling dizzy, drowsy or light-headed, reduced alertness, memory problems, clumsiness, tiredness and changes in libido.

If you take them regularly, each night, you also become used to them so they no longer work effectively. It only takes between 3 to 14 days of continued used to become tolerant to commonly prescribed sleeping tablets. As a result, withdrawal symptoms such as anxiety, shaking or simply feeling awful can occur when sleeping tablets are stopped suddenly.

Traditional herbal medicines used to help promote sleep tend to have a more gentle action and are not associated with such a wide range of unwanted side effects. The combination of Valerian and Passionflower, for example, may occasionally cause intestinal problems such as nausea or abdominal cramps, but neither herb is known to cause tolerance or withdrawal symptoms.



# Frequently asked QUESTIONS

Dr Sarah Brewer qualified as a doctor from Cambridge University. After working in general practice, she now specialises in medical nutrition, health communication and is an award-winning health writer and the author of over 50 popular self-help books.



- My doctor prescribed ten sleeping tablets for insomnia linked with anxiety about my job. They make me feel dopey the next day, so I've only used two.

  How else can I get a good night's sleep?
- A Sleeping tablets are usually only prescribed for short periods of time to help you get back into a sleep routine, but they don't suit everyone. Do go back to see your doctor for follow-up advice. You may wish to discuss using a traditional herbal medicine instead, as these are less likely to cause a residual hang-over effect next day. Unused prescription medicines should be handed into a pharmacist for safe disposal.
- I recently experienced a bereavement and find I can't sleep for the first time in my life. I lay awake tossing and turning. Is this normal?
  - Whether it's the loss of a parent, partner, child, family pet or close friend, the loss of a loved one is a devastating experience that causes an enormous amount of anxiety. Sleep problems such as difficulty getting off to sleep, waking early, or experiencing disturbing dreams are a normal part of the grieving process. As sleep is also one of nature's healers, it's important to get as good a night's rest as you can. When it's your partner who has died, the bedroom is associated with memories of them, and it may help to move into a spare room for a while, or even better - stay with relatives or friends. Alternatively, ask someone you are close to if you can phone them before going to bed, so you can voice any worries or thoughts that might otherwise stop you sleeping.

- l've suffered from broken sleep for over 20 years. I now typically have 2 hours sleep, then 3 hours awake, followed by another 3 hours sleep. Surely I need more than 5 hours a night?
- A Most people need less and less sleep as they get older, and it may be that 5 hours is right for you. If you feel refreshed during the day, you are probably getting all the sleep you need. If that is the case, make use of your new-found hours by developing a relaxing hobby you can indulge at any hour such as reading, painting, or writing your memoires. Having said that, older people can suffer from sleep disturbance too. The give-away signs include feeling tired and listless during the day, yawning a lot, and feeling unusually irritable or snappy.
- I suffer from panic attacks which keep me awake. Can anything help me deal with situations better, so I can relax?
- A Panic attacks are usually linked with over-breathing, so you breathe out too much carbon dioxide gas. This makes your blood more alkaline and affects the way messages travel through your nervous system, leading to symptoms such as pins-and-needles, dizziness and feelings of panic. If you find yourself breathing quickly, or feel panic rising, try to slow your breathing breathing in and out of your cupped hands (or the traditional brown paper bag) helps you breathe back in some of the lost carbon dioxide.

<sup>\*</sup>Dr Sarah Brewer does not endorse any brands.



### Bonuit® Sleep Aid – For the Sleep you Dream of!

Bonuit® Sleep Aid is a traditional herbal medicinal product used for the temporary relief of sleep disturbances due to symptoms of mild anxiety, exclusively based on long-standing use as a traditional remedy.

Each Bonuit® Sleep Aid tablet contains a unique formulation combining Valerian root extract (*Valeriana officinalis*) with high strength Passion Flower herb extract (*Passiflora incarnata*).

Bonuit <sup>®</sup> at a glance						
Main Ingredient	Valerian root (Valeriana officinalis L.) and					
	Passion Flower herb (Passiflora incarnata L.)					
Strength	Each tablet contains I 25mg of dried Valerian root extract (equivalent to					
	375-750mg of Valerian root) and 250mg of dried Passion Flower herb					
	extract (equivalent to 1250-1750mg Passion Flower herb)					
Dose	One to two tablets daily - 30 minutes before bedtime					
Vegetarian 🗸	Vegan	×	Lactose free	1	Gluten free	1
Wheat free 🗸	Soya free	1	Corn free	1	Sugar free	×

For maximum benefit, take Bonuit® Sleep Aid for at least two weeks, continuously, as treatment effects may not be apparent immediately.

If symptoms worsen or do not improve after 4 weeks, seek advice from a doctor or other qualified healthcare practitioner.

Always read the label.

Available from leading pharmacies and health food stores. Price: £9.99 for 30 tablets.

For more information telephone: 01628 401980 or visit bonuit.co.uk

### Did you know?

"Bonne nuit" is French for "Goodnight"

#### Why choose a traditional herbal medicine?

When an herbal product is registered under the Traditional Herbal Registration Scheme, it means it has undergone independent safety and quality assessment by the Government's regulatory body, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

#### Registration under this scheme means that:









