

Sleeping Better on the Ward

A Guide for Children and Young People

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When you are in hospital, it can be tricky to get a good night's sleep for lots of reasons. We often sleep better in dark, quiet, and familiar places, so it might feel difficult to fall asleep on the ward if:

- It is busy with staff, patients, and families visiting.
- There are lots of things going on around you.
- There are lots of noises like machines beeping.
- Your medical team need to check in on you regularly.
- It is cooler or warmer on the ward than it is at home.
- Your room looks a bit different to your bedroom at home.
- You are away from family and friends.
- You are used to having a different daily routine.
- You are concerned about missing school or clubs.
- You feel worried or scared about something.
- You are feeling unwell.



This leaflet has information, tips, and strategies to help you sleep better on the ward. You can work through these at your own pace, by yourself, or with the help of a parent or carer.

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Commonly asked questions about sleep



Why is sleep important?

Getting enough sleep is important for your physical and mental wellbeing. Sleep gives your body a rest and allows it to prepare for the next day. It lets your mind recharge and can help you think more clearly, concentrate better, and feel in a good mood.



How many hours do I need?

The amount of sleep a person needs usually depends on their age. Babies and toddlers usually sleep the most but there may be times when older children and teenagers need more sleep too, like if they are unwell and need to rest.

Age group	Recommended hours
Babies (aged 0-1)	12 to 17 hours per day
Toddlers (aged 1-2)	11 to 14 hours per day
Preschool children (aged 3-5)	10 to 13 hours per day
Children (aged 6-13)	9 to 11 hours per day
Teenagers (aged 14-17)	8 to 10 hours per day



What happens if I don't get enough sleep?

You might feel tired and find it hard to think, concentrate and remember things if you do not get enough sleep. You might not feel like spending time on hobbies and the activities and you may notice a difference in your mood (for example, you might feel grumpy, teary, anxious, or even worried).



What can I do to sleep better?

Sleep can be impacted by lots of different things such as the space around us (our environment), the activities we do throughout the day, what we eat and drink, and our physical health. You can set yourself up for a good nights sleep by making small changes to some of these things, exploring helpful tips, and testing out some relaxation strategies.

Tips for sleeping better at home and on the ward

Sometimes making small changes to the space around you can have a big impact on sleep. Below are some things you can try to sleep better at home and on the ward.

	At home	On the ward
<i>Lighting</i> 	Make your room as dark as it can be by: • Shutting your door, drawing your curtains, or using blackout blinds to block outside lights. • Dimming your lights or using fairy lights while getting ready for bed to help prepare you for sleep.	Make your room as dark as it can be by: • Using portable black out blinds to block outside lights. • Using an eye mask to block out light if you are unable to lower the lighting around you.
<i>Noise</i> 	Make your room as quiet as it can be by: • Keeping your bedroom door shut at night to reduce noise. • Using a sound machine or phone app to play calming noises.	Make your room as quiet as it can be by: • Wearing ear plugs to block out noise from the ward. • Listening to a gentle music playlist (with earphones, if needed). • Using a sound machine or phone app to play calming noises.
<i>Comfort and temperature</i> 	Make your room comfortable by: • Keeping it at a comfortable temperature around 15-19°C to encourage better sleep. • Adding a blanket over your bed at night in the winter if you feel cold. • Keeping your room tidy at night and removing anything that might distract you from sleeping (e.g., toys, game consoles, and electronics).	Make your room comfortable by: • Bringing a familiar pillow, cosy jumper, or blanket from home. • Bringing comfortable clothing to wear on the ward. • Bringing a favourite toy, book, or film to help pass the time. • Using a portable mini fan to cool your room if it gets warm. • Wearing socks on or off in bed to help you keep warm or cool, as needed.

Setting up for a good night's sleep

Preparation for a good night's sleep often starts well before bedtime! The length and quality of the sleep you get can be impacted by what you do and eat during the day, as well as how you feel.

Movement & diet

Try to get some movement in every day if you are well enough. The best time to get some movement is in the morning or before dinner. Even some gentle exercise can help make your body ready for sleep. You could try:

- Going on a family walk.
- Visiting the ward garden.
- Doing any physiotherapy exercises you have.
- Playing an active game.
- Doing some light yoga exercises from YouTube.



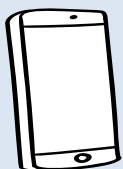
Getting some daylight and fresh air in the middle of day can improve your chances of sleeping when it gets dark again at night. If you cannot go outside, spending some time outside your room can be helpful too. If you feel up to it, why not visit the ward lounge, hospital hub, or shop?

Routines and naps

Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day can help your brain and body fall into a regular sleep schedule. If you are well enough, try to avoid napping too much during the day as this can delay when your body feels ready for sleep at night. If you do need to lie down or nap, make sure that you do this on your bed where you would normally sleep. This will help your brain learn that it is time for sleep whenever you get into bed at night.



It is important to avoid things like sugary snacks, coffee, tea, fizzy juice and energy drinks in the afternoon and evening, as these foods and drinks can stay in your body and keep you awake for a long time!



Bright lights can make your mind feel alert and make it harder for you to get a good sleep. To give yourself enough time to wind down for bed, electronic devices should be turned off at least 30 minutes before bed. This includes TVs, computers, games consoles and mobile phones.

Winding down for bed

Developing a bedtime routine can help settle your mind and body for sleep. After getting any important or tough tasks out of the way (like homework!), make some time for calming and quiet activities. This might include:

- Dimming the lights in your room and making your room comfortable.
- Having a pamper session with facemasks or taking a warm shower to relax.
- Listening to relaxing music or calming sounds, like ocean waves or the rainforest.
- Trying relaxation strategies, such as square breathing or muscle relaxation, to help your body unwind (*see next page for more information*).
- Doing calming activities if you are struggling to fall asleep, such as reading a book or mindful colouring (*see next page for more information*).



Busy minds

It can be hard to switch our minds off at bedtime, especially if it has been a busy day. Being in hospital can be stressful and sometimes worries might keep you awake. Why not try the following tips for managing a busy mind?

- Take your mind off busy thoughts by playing a distraction game (e.g., counting sheep or thinking of a different song or movie for every letter of the alphabet).
- Try keeping a diary to get your thoughts and worries out of your mind at bedtime and down on paper instead.
- If you are having lots of anxious thoughts, try the relaxation strategies in this leaflet to help calm your mind.
- You might want to discuss your worries with your medical team if this continues or if you have specific worries about your aspects of your diagnosis or treatment.



Worry time

Why not make space in your day for worry time, when you can talk things through with a family member or friend? If you notice any worries forming throughout the day, make a note to think about them later during worry time and try to switch your focus back to what you are doing or a fun, distracting activity.

Impact of medication and treatment

Sometimes taking certain medications or treatments can affect the length sleep we get and how well rested we feel after sleeping. If you think this might be the case for you, speak with your medical team for guidance to see if anything can be done to reduce the impact on your sleep.

Relaxation

Making time to relax can help you settle down and get back to sleep. The following strategies are all great ways to relax your mind and body. It might take a bit of practice before you feel confident with them but once you are, you can use them whenever you need to!

If you have an injury or are experiencing pain because of a health condition, please discuss these exercises with your medical team before practicing.

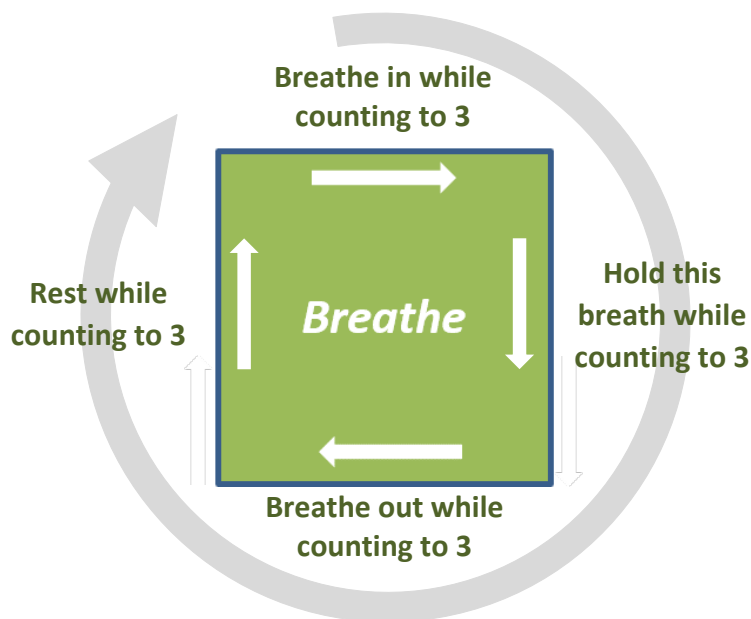


Square Breathing

Square breathing is a simple and quick exercise that can help you to calm your body down, let go of tension, and fall asleep.

Why not have a go?

Begin by placing one hand on your stomach and taking a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to fill all your lungs with air. You can tell when you are taking a deep breath because your stomach will push outwards against your hand. Then, going clockwise, follow the instructions around the square ...



Repeat this a few times to help take control of your body and feel calmer.

Tips

- Use a clock, timer, or phone app to help time your breaths.
- Calm your mind during this exercise by picturing somewhere you feel happy or focus on an encouraging word with each breath, such as 'relax'.

Muscle Relaxation

Our bodies can often feel tired, heavy, or tense by the end of the day, and sometimes this can get in the way of falling or staying asleep. Muscle relaxation encourages better sleep by releasing physical tension in the body.

Why not have a go?

1. Begin by sitting or lying down somewhere warm, quiet, and comfortable (like a comfortable chair or your bed).
2. Find any areas of muscle tension in the body then gently stretch and tense these muscles for up to 5 seconds.
3. Gently release the tension and focus it disappearing from your body.
4. Repeat or apply tension to other muscle groups until you feel relaxed.



Face	Scrunch up your face, squeeze your eyes tight, push your lips together, and then relax.
Neck	Push your head backwards against a chair or bed then let it rest while you relax.
Shoulders	Push your shoulders upwards then gently roll them forward and let them fall.
Arms and hands	Stretch your arms out in front of you, clench your hands as if you were squeezing all the juice out of a lemon in the palm of your hand, let go and rest them by your side.
Stomach	Push your stomach out, take a big deep breath, hold it, then relax as you exhale.
Legs and feet	Point your toes downwards, gently raise your legs, stretch them out in front of you, release and let them rest.

Tips

- Practice muscle relaxation at a time when no one will interrupt you like when you are getting ready for bed.
- Be gentle when trying this exercise - if you experience any physical discomfort while practicing muscle relaxation, stop and let someone know.

Mindful colouring

Mindful colouring is a calming activity that help can focus your mind on positive images and colours, and away from unhelpful or worried thoughts. This makes it a great activity to try in the evening or at night if you are struggling to fall asleep. Why not have a go at colouring in some of the pictures throughout this leaflet or in our mindful colouring booklet.



My Sleep Checklist

Why not have a go at creating your own sleep checklist with tips and strategies you can test out this week? Tick or cross out each item when completed.

This week I will try:

1. _____

☐

2. _____

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3. _____

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4. _____

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