

Coping with sleeplessness



Many victims of crime often notice that for some time after the crime they experience difficulty sleeping. Memories and feelings associated with the event often revisit you at night making you jumpy and fearful. Remember, these are normal reactions after a traumatic event and are usually temporary.

Below is a list of suggestions that may better prepare you for a good night's sleep. Some may work for you and others may not. **Remember that everyone is different.**

- ♦ Try not to go to bed too early or at a fixed time. This may mean you lie awake feeling angry and frustrated. Go to bed only when you feel sleepy.
- ♦ Try to maintain your usual bedtime routine. Your body is aware of this routine and relies on this information to assist in a good night's sleep.
- ♦ Too much or too little food can impact on your ability to sleep. Hunger may wake you during the night. Try having a snack or warm drink before bed. Try to allow four hours to lapse before going to bed after a big meal.
- ♦ Reduce caffeine and nicotine. Giving up caffeine or reducing your intake can often make a big difference to sleep quality. Nicotine is also a stimulant like caffeine, so smoking in the evening can make it difficult to go to sleep.
- ♦ Try having a warm bath or shower before going to bed. Don't make it too hot and try putting some lavender essential oil in the bath or burning some essential oil in a burner.
- ♦ Meditate before going to bed. Take time to focus on your breathing, taking deep breaths in and then exhaling, trying to calm yourself. See if you can focus on something pleasant such as a special place, not on the fact that you can't go to sleep.
- ♦ Create a comfortable sleep environment. It can be helpful if the room you sleep in is quiet, dark and at a comfortable temperature. Try earplugs or an eye mask if your room is noisy or too light.
- ♦ Leave a soft light on if you need to.

Further practical tips and suggestions

- ♦ Exercising regularly can improve your quality of sleep. Try walking in your local park or going to your local gym. Check the yellow pages for gyms in your local area or aquatic centres where you can use the pool to do some laps.

- ♦ Some people believe drinking alcohol in the evening may help relax you. However, after a few hours these effects wear off causing withdrawal. This can result in increased alertness making it harder to remain asleep later in the night.
- ♦ Go for a professional massage or get a friend or partner to give you a massage. Some places have student massage clinics for massage therapists in training. These places are usually much cheaper.
- ♦ Practice relaxation techniques. Many bookshops and libraries have ready-made relaxation tapes. You could also try looking on the internet for sites with information on relaxation techniques or meditation.
- ♦ Write down issues that are worrying you and ways to resolve them. This may help you from worrying about things in bed. Try allocating a time to think about the day's events and what lies before you tomorrow, then resolve not to think about these issues until the next day.
- ♦ If you are concerned about your inability to sleep or you find that nothing is working for you, speak to your GP or a counsellor.

Coping with nightmares

Here are some things you can try after waking from a nightmare that may help to calm you down:

- ♦ If possible try not to lie in a state of fear for too long – remind yourself that you are safe now and move around. Make yourself a warm drink or have a warm bath or shower.
- ♦ If you can, try to get up and put the light on. Walk around to reorientate yourself to your immediate surroundings. Remind yourself what day and year it is, where you are now, and remind yourself that you are safe now.
- ♦ Write down the dream/nightmare in a book in detail. Shut the book and put it away in another part of the house, and remind yourself to leave the images there.
- ♦ Try putting the TV or radio on, or read something light. This may help distract your mind from distressing dream images.
- ♦ If nightmares are particularly fierce, there may be something in your daily life that's triggering them. Is there something you need to face up to or protect yourself from? Your thoughts and feelings

need some type of expression and if you tend to them during the day they are less likely to plague you at night. Talk about or write down your feelings and thoughts in the daytime to reduce the need to process them during sleep.

How can counselling help you?

Counselling can provide you with support and an opportunity to talk to a trained professional in a confidential environment. Counselling may assist you in finding ways to manage the stress and trauma associated with the violence you have experienced. Counselling may also assist by connecting you with further support services or referrals to agencies in your local area.

Applying for counselling through Victims Services Approved Counselling Scheme is very straightforward. For further information about the Approved Counselling Scheme or to obtain an application please contact the Victims Access Line .

Victims Access Line (VAL)

You can call the VAL for information about your rights as a victim of crime, how to access counselling and compensation and assistance with completing victim impact statements.

The Support Coordination Team can provide confidential emotional support and crisis counselling, help in identifying your needs, and referrals to other groups and services that may assist you in your recovery.

Phone 1800 633 063
Sydney metropolitan area (02) 8688 5511
Fax (02) 8688 9632
Email vs@agd.nsw.gov.au
Website www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au
Address all mail to The Director
Victims Services
Locked Bag 5118
Parramatta NSW 2124

Other places of support

Better Health Channel

Website www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Health and medical information for consumers

Local GPs

Website www.mydr.com.au
Allows you to search for a GP in your local area.

You can also see your local GP and ask to be referred to a sleep disorders clinic at your nearest hospital.

Relaxation and meditation centres

Look for relaxation or meditation centres in the Yellow Pages or on the internet. For rural areas, contact your local community centre.

NSW Association of Massage Therapists

Phone (02) 9517 9925

Website www.amt-ltd.org.au
Contact details of massage therapists in your area.

Community Colleges

Phone (02) 9642 5622

Website www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au
Community Colleges provides information on courses or classes in your area.