

# Sleep

Life After Stroke





## **Introduction: Issues with sleep following stroke**

## Problems with sleep following stroke

Many people find that they have problems with their sleep after a stroke. Lack of sleep can have a big impact on the way you feel, how well you are able to cope and how well you are able to work towards your recovery.

Reasons you may be finding it difficult to sleep include:

- Worry & anxiety
- Struggling to find a comfortable position
- Bad dreams
- Low mood
- Pain

The good news is that there are many different things you can do to help improve your sleep.

**NB:** There may be other, non stroke related, factors that could also be affecting your sleep pattern.



**Ways of improving sleep**

## Improving your sleep: worry and anxiety

Worry and anxiety can also keep you awake at night:

- Focus on the 'here and now' – mindfulness
- There are lots of different mindfulness exercises you can try to help you find what works best for you. These include breathing exercises such as the 4-7-8 exercise:
  - 1. Make a whoosh sound by exhaling completely through your mouth
  - 2. Shut your mouth and breathe in through your nose, counting to 4 in your head
  - 3. Hold your breath for 7 seconds
  - 4. Exhale by making a whoosh sound again for a count of 8 seconds
  - 5. Repeat the cycle another 3 times

## Improving your sleep: routine and daylight

- Aim to go to bed at the same time every night
- Choose a time when you are naturally tired – going to bed when you are not tired will lead to problems sleeping
- Aim to wake up at the same time every day
- Try to continue this pattern over weekends and holidays
- Getting enough natural light every day will help with your sleeping pattern – aim for 20-30 minutes each day

# Improving your sleep: alcohol, caffeine and food

## **Alcohol:**

- Some people use alcohol to help them sleep. However, alcohol has a negative impact on your quality of sleep and will often result in you waking up during the night. It is best to avoid alcohol at least 4 hours before going to bed

## **Caffeine:**

- Keeps you awake and can affect you several hours after drinking it. Reducing caffeine can improve your sleep. Avoid caffeine from mid afternoon onwards. Try drinking decaffeinated options

## **Food:**

- Big meals in the evening, especially fatty ones, can affect how you sleep. Staying away from spicy and acidic foods can also help with sleep, especially if these foods cause heartburn or an upset stomach

## Improving your sleep: screen time and blue light

Screens from electronic devices such as mobile phones, laptops and televisions give off a 'blue light':

- Blue light from screens gives your body a signal to stay awake
- Avoid social media for at least 90 minutes before bed
- Be 'screen free' for at least 1 hour before going to bed. This helps to avoid blue light and lets your mind start to relax
- You can reduce the impact of blue light by using the 'night mode' setting on your devices in the evenings. You can also buy amber glasses that filter out blue light from screens



## Improving your sleep: your environment

- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and a comfortable temperature.
- Find out what makes you tired, for example, reading a book, taking a bath or listening to music. Doing these things before bed will help create a bedtime routine.
- Following this advice will help your brain to understand that getting into bed means it is time to sleep. This helps your body to relax and release the sleep hormone melatonin.
- It is also important to make sure the mattress you are sleeping on is comfortable. Sleeping on an uncomfortable mattress can prevent you from getting a good sleep and you may wake up with aches and pains that can affect you through the day



**Support and useful links**

## Support and useful links

- [NHS Inform](#)
- [Sleepio App](#)
- [NICE.org](#)
- [Moodjuice](#)

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