**Pain and sleep**

Sleep is really important. We don’t know exactly why – there are theories about emotional processing, learning, as well as replenishment of energy – but all mammals sleep, so there must be an evolutionary need for sleep. A pain experience doesn’t necessarily disturb sleep, but poor sleep certainly has an impact on the pain experience, we cope less well if sleep is disturbed.

*How much sleep do we need?*

There are no hard and fast rules, some people function perfectly well on 3 hours, other people really struggle with 8 hours. The question is – does your current sleep pattern have consequences on your ability to function, as you would like?

*How do we go to sleep?*

1. Internal body clock determines it is time for sleep – Circadian rhythm
2. It is long enough since the last sleep
3. In a low level of arousal – not stressed, scared or angry

*If you think sleep is an issue there are three areas to consider:*

1. Physical activity – the more physically active you are through the day, the better your sleep is likely to be.
2. Social contact – evidence suggests people who have social contact have better quality sleep.
3. Sleep hygiene – we will explore this last in more detail in the next section.

Sleep hygiene refers to all the factors that can be altered with the aim of improving sleep quality.

*Stimulants*: such as caffeine (including tea, hot chocolate and many cold remedies), nicotine and alcohol. Although alcohol may help you go to sleep, is reduces the quality of sleep.

*Sleep conditions*: what is the environment you are sleeping in? Too hot or too cold? Remove or hide the clock. Remove the TV – the blue light closely mimics daylight and can affect your body clock.

*No napping*: there is often a desire to sleep in the afternoon, a siesta. A 10-15 minute power nap maybe useful, but if you sleep 45-60 minutes then the deeper sleep may affect sleep at night.

*Routine*: when we wake and first open the curtains, the sunlight resets the timing of your body clock. Keeping the same wake up time every day, and getting up then whether the nights sleep has been good or not establishes and maintains a sleep routine. Similarly thinking about the routine you have for going to bed - is there wind down time? is there relaxing, non-stimulating activity?

*Over active minds*: people frequently find it hard to ‘shut-off’ their mind. Write a to-do list for tomorrow so you know you won’t forget something important. Keep paper by the bed for the things that spring into your mind.

*Positive links*: If you are not going off to sleep, get up, go and do an activity in anther room, and go back to bed when you are sleepy. Keep a positive link between the bed and sleeping.

For all this advice, sleep is personal. Many people eat rich food, drink alcohol and have a strong coffee and cigarette after a meal yet sleep with no problem. You need to play with these variable to see if there are some that lead you to have a better nights sleep. There are no hard and fast rules.