

Mental Health & Wellbeing at the Bar

Lack of sleep



Wellbeing
at the Bar

Lack of sleep

Over 30% of the British population experience sleep issues including insomnia and sleep apnoea.

Consistently poor sleepers are at much higher risk of early death than those who sleep well. Lack of this vital wellbeing ingredient leads to higher incidence of cardiovascular problems and raised risk of diabetes and obesity.

Sleep appears to have some key physiological and psychological purposes. Lack of sleep is also likely to result in you performing at a significantly reduced level because of poor quality, shortened sleep cycles. Whilst occasional bouts of bad sleep are part of a busy working life, we should all take steps to prevent this becoming the norm.

Primarily, sleep allows our bodies and minds recovery time. It also strengthens neural connections in the brain that form memories and process thinking.

Conversely, connections that no longer serve a purpose for us are pruned. Increasing evidence suggests that the brain also clears itself of protein and lipid waste when we sleep and this may indicate that sleep protects us from early cognitive decline (such as dementia related conditions).

Enhancing our health, wellbeing and performance through good quality sleep can be achieved through a number of practical steps.

Why do we sleep?

Scientists still don't fully understand the purpose of sleep however we do know that it holds several vital keys to optimal functioning. We may admire business leaders and politicians who claim to survive on very little sleep, but in reality lack of sleep can have an impact as detrimental to our performance as alcohol impairment.

Tips for improved sleep

Stop smoking – smokers can take up to twice as long to fall asleep as non-smokers. This is quickly remedied after giving up smoking. A Pennsylvania State University study showed that the time taken to fall asleep was reduced by a third within only 2 days of giving up smoking.

Pre-sleep stretch / yoga – avoid cardiovascular exercise for up to 3hrs before bed.

No TV or smart devices in the bedroom – avoid using devices for at least 30mins before bed as the light from these devices interrupts the production of the sleep hormone melatonin.

Avoid caffeine and alcohol – avoid after midday. Although Alcohol promotes GABA (a neurotransmitter involved in managing stress and anxiety), it only achieves this for a very short period before it then starts depleting, causing sleep problems, anxiety and nervousness.

Nutrients – eat foods rich in tryptophan which converts to serotonin, the raw material for the sleep hormone melatonin. Oatcakes with tuna, chicken or turkey. Banana protein smoothie. Sunflower seeds or almonds or a small pot of natural yogurt with sunflower seeds and a banana.

Regular routine – quiet, dark bedroom at cool temperature, take a warm bath.

Dealing with ruminating thoughts – find a method that works for you. This may be a talking therapy, a meditation podcast or writing out your worries on paper.

Where can I find out more?

- <http://thesleepschool.org/>
- <https://sleepfoundation.org/excessivesleepiness/sleep-tools-tips/healthy-sleep-tips>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia/Pages/bedtimeritual.aspx>