



# Managing Sleep Problems in Chronic Pain

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## Managing Sleep Problems in Chronic Pain

Sleep can become a problem in chronic pain.

People can develop bad habits such as: taking long daytime naps; drinking too much alcohol; even spending all day in bed. These make problems worse. Thankfully sleep should improve if you use the advice in this leaflet and stick with it.

### **Avoid sleeping in the daytime**

Not getting up in the morning or taking long naps will mean you are less likely to sleep at bedtime. So get up in the morning (even after a bad night) and limit any nap to fifteen minutes.

### **Be active without overdoing it in the day**

Sleep will follow more naturally after a full day living life as well as is possible. However, chronic pain means it is important to pace physical activity evenly and avoid overdoing it.

### **Have a relaxing wind-down routine**

Teach your body and mind it is time to sleep by giving yourself a relaxing wind-down routine. For example a nice warm bath, a milky drink, dimmed lights and gentle entertainment such as TV, reading or Facebook. People with chronic pain can find changing into bed clothes and washing tiring so why not do that earlier in the evening. Many people with chronic pain use formal relaxation strategies such as listening to a relaxation CD or meditating to help them become sleepy.

### **Don't have a TV in your bedroom or read too long in bed.**

If you've got a sleep problem, your bed should really be just for sleeping or intimacy. TV or reading can be a good part of your wind down routine but try doing these activities elsewhere. Some people choose to watch TV or read on the sofa, a recliner, or even in a different bedroom to where they sleep.

### **Avoid caffeine leading to bedtime (so no tea, cola or IRNBRU in the evening)**

Caffeine acts against the chemicals that make us sleepy. Even if you can fall asleep after drinking caffeine you'll wake up earlier. Avoid drinking caffeinated drinks every time you take a break during the day. It is best to stop drinking caffeine at tea time. Don't be tempted to drink caffeine if you can't sleep at night. Herb teas, a milky drink, or decaffeinated tea or coffee can be good alternatives.

### **Get your bed and bedroom as comfortable as possible**

There is no hard or fast rule about whether you should have a firm, soft or memory foam mattress. It is important to get the temperature, lighting and comfort of your bed to suit you.

### **Go to bed only once you are sleepy even if that is quite late at night**

This makes it more likely you will fall asleep when you do so

### **Aim to be sleeping for most of the time you spend in bed,**

It is too easy to teach the body and nervous system to be awake when you are in bed. This happens if you spend a lot of time lying in bed, trying to sleep. You end up tossing and turning, worrying about not getting enough sleep, clock watching, worrying about other things, or even just reading or watching TV in bed. **Being asleep when you are in bed teaches your body and nervous system that sleeping is what happens in bed.** It helps to keep to the fifteen minute rule: so if you haven't fallen asleep in about fifteen minutes, get up. Once you get up start your wind-down routine again and try going to bed again when you feel sleepy. Discussing the above with your partner may help.

**Following all this advice takes discipline and effort: Better sleep is the reward you can earn.**

- Further information is available from:
- <http://sites.google.com/site/fifepaininfo/>      [www.sleepnet.com](http://www.sleepnet.com)
- [www.painassociation.com](http://www.painassociation.com)      [www.painconcern.org.uk](http://www.painconcern.org.uk)
- **Free internet access is available at your local library.**