

Information Sheet

Coping With Sleep Difficulty

Sleep difficulty is common for people under stress and for many survivors.

If you are suffering with sleeping difficulty here are some tips for how you can help yourself:

- Prepare yourself before going to bed
- Exercise early in the day
- Avoid spicy or heavy foods and caffeine a few hours before you go to bed
- Have a milky drink or camomile tea before bed
- Take time to relax by having a warm bath, listen to relaxing music, or complete a relaxation exercise
- Don't go to bed before you are tired (only go when you are sleepy), do not try to get more sleep by going to bed early
- Make sure your room is quiet, your bed is comfortable, make your environment feel safe (e.g. put locks on your windows or hang pictures of your support people on the walls)
- Use your bed only for sleeping. Do not read, watch TV or eat in bed unless you are sure by past experience that these activities help you to sleep.
- Do not do upsetting things right before bed. Give yourself 30 minutes earlier in the evening as your worry time. Write down your worrying thoughts (in a room other than your bedroom) and leave that piece of paper somewhere other than your bedroom.
- When in bed use relaxation and distraction exercises (e.g. visualise sleepy, relaxing things or places).
- If you have not fallen asleep in about 15-20 minutes, or if you wake up and cannot get back to sleep, get up and do something until you feel sleepy again (do not lie there tossing and turning) go to a different room and do something different and unstimulating (e.g. reading, ironing **DO NOT watch TV**).
- Return to bed after a break when you feel sleepy.
- If all these fail and you still can't sleep, don't fight it. Don't get mad at yourself, don't tell yourself how badly you need sleep, or start thinking about everything you have to do the next day. Decide that lying quietly and listening to soft music will *at least* rest your body and you won't fade by missing a few nights sleep. Perhaps get up and do something you really like such as reading a good book.
- Set your alarm and get up at the same time every morning regardless of how much sleep you received during the night.
- **DO NOT** catnap during the day. This will only make it more difficult to establish a pattern for sleep and make it more difficult to sleep at night. Try to establish a routine for your body.
- Insomnia can be a symptom of stress, and it can lead to further stress. The important thing is to respond to it in ways that soothe and nurture, even if you are not sleeping.

Sources:

Powell, T. 1992. "*Managing Anxiety*."

Adapted from the Victorian Centre Against Sexual Assault Information Sheet "Insomnia"