

Hi. My name is Liz Durbock, and I'm a student counselor here at the ANU Counselling Centre. And today, I'm going to be talking about improving your sleep. And this is based on one of our handouts entitled *Improving Your Sleep*. The handout is available on our website and in hard copy at an office in building 18.

So now, I'm just going to go through the main evidence-based strategies for normalizing the sleep cycle. Here, it's important to know that the evidence suggests that it takes four to six weeks of consistently and persistently following a complete sleep program to achieve lasting improvement. So, for example, if you only follow some of the strategies or only do them for a few days or a few weeks, you're unlikely to experience any sustained improvements in your sleep cycle.

So the first strategy is to go to bed only when you are actually sleepy. And this is because sleepiness comes in waves, usually between 60 to 90 minutes long. So if you're feeling sleepy and it's about the time that you'd like to be going to bed and you push through it, when you finish that activity, then you may not feel sleepy again for another 60 to 90 minutes. So ideally, when you're feeling sleepy and it is about the right time to be going to bed, drop everything and start getting ready to go to bed and go to bed.

The next strategy is to not use your bed for anything except sleep, and sex is the exception. And the reason for this is that the brain makes associations between our environment and our activities. So if we're in bed and we're watching TV or reading a book or on the computer or on the phone, then the brain has this association between being in bed and being awake and active and alert, and you don't want that connection. So any of those activities, ideally, are done outside of the bedroom. Or if that's not possible, then outside of the bed but in the same room.

If you're in it bed and you're trying to fall asleep and haven't been able to fall asleep after about 20 to 30 minutes, you need to get up out of the bed. And the idea behind this is similar to that previous strategy in that if you're in bed and you're awake, your brain now has the association about being in bed and being awake. Or if you tend to worry in bed, then the brain has the association about being in bed and worrying. So the idea is if you haven't fallen asleep after 20 to 30 minutes, get up, ideally go into another room, and do something boring. And while you're doing that something boring, you're waiting for the next wave of sleepiness. And when that wave comes, go back to bed and try again.

Now, some of the suggestions that I have for doing something boring are things like reading a book that you've already read before. Because you already know what happens next, you already know how it ends, so you're not going to get too stimulated. You could ride the bus timetable or dictionary. You could watch infomercials, but I recommend keeping the light low. And also, I wouldn't recommend getting onto the computer or the internet,

because that could be stimulating.

So if you return to bed and still can't get back to sleep, you need to repeat that strategy. So you need to get out of the bed, go to another room, do something boring, wait for the wave of sleepiness, and then try again. If you wake in the middle of the night and, again, can't get back to sleep, repeat that strategy. So as you can see, even though I've just talked about three separate strategies, they're all related in terms of breaking the association about being in bed and being awake.

The next strategy is to get up at the same time each morning, regardless of how much or how little sleep you had the night before. So this is seven days a week. Now, remember, this is a sleep program which you follow for four to six weeks. So this is maybe a strategy you can play around with once you've normalized your sleep cycle, but until then, I'd really encourage you to be strict about this particular strategy. So the idea is choose a wake time. Maybe work backwards to how many hours sleep that would be right for you. So if you're a six-hour-a-night person, then you work backwards from when you'd like to wake up. If you're a seven- or eight-hour-a-night person, then you would backwards from there.

Most people need between seven and nine hours sleep, which is where the average of eight comes from. But you really do need to try and be aware of how much sleep you actually need. So, for example, if you're a nine-hour-a-night person and you're only getting eight hours, that's not enough for you. Whereas, eight hours for someone who needs seven hours is too much. So you really need to be aware of that. And one way that you can keep a track of that is to keep a sleep diary. And there are plenty online that you can choose from if that's something you'd like to do. So getting up at the same time each morning, regardless of how much or how little sleep you had the night before, and this sets your body clock.

The next strategy is no napping during the day. And this is because napping during the day can interfere with your nighttime sleep. But also, the amount of sleep we need is kind of within a 24-hour cycle. So if we are a nine-hour-a-night person, for example, and we have a nap of two hours during the day, can't really expect to sleep nine hours again that night, because we've already had two hours. So this rule means that if you are feeling sleepy during the day, you do push through the sleepiness. If you're feeling sleepy at mid-afternoon and you want to have a sleep, I would suggest doing something active. Getting out, going for a walk, meeting a friend so that you're in a position where you can't really have a nap.

The next strategy is to learn how to do relaxation. So things like guided relaxation to an audio recording or slow breathing exercises or meditation or yoga. And the reason this can be an important strategy-- and it may not suit your individual needs, but it's important for people that would describe themselves as light sleepers. So if you're a light sleeper, then doing some relaxation training may mean that you get up or wake up less frequently during the

night.

And the final evidence-based strategy is to learn to reduce worrying and thinking bad. And you can do this using mindfulness-based strategies. You can do this using cognitive behavioral strategies such as worry scheduling. Now, we do have separate handouts on relaxation and managing anxiety, so please do refer to them if tension or worry interfere with your sleep.

I hope this talking tip has been helpful. And please remember that if you think you could benefit from a face-to-face talk with a counselor here at the center, just call 6125 2442 to make an appointment. Thanks for listening and bye for now.