

SLEEP X ANXIETY



- Understanding the vicious cycle
- Changing your approach to sleep

It's been a long day and you've been staring at your laptop for potentially 10 hours straight. You remember that you have a 9 am meeting tomorrow so quickly eat some dinner, reply to your messages, and then get ready for bed.

You're now in bed. You've calculated that if you go to sleep within the next half an hour, you will have at least seven hours of sleep, which is fine. Unless you can't fall asleep, which you haven't been able to do for weeks now...

Okay if you fall asleep now you will have at least six hours of sleep, You can definitely survive off of six hours of sleep. You still haven't heard back from that person so you quickly check your phone. Oops, just spent an hour scrolling through Instagram. Now you're worried about how behind you are on your project, what time is it? Now you have 4.5 hours left.....

Your alarm goes off and you feel exhausted, irritable, and groggy. You press snooze and end up sleeping in. Does any of this sound familiar?

The cure and the cause

If you experience anxiety or persistent stress, it is likely that you may worry often and subsequently ruminate about your concerns when alone and in bed. In other words, it may be very hard for you to switch off. A lack of sleep can in turn, negatively affect your mental health. Sleep, as we are regularly reminded, is vital for cognitive function and bodily repair. Paradoxically, worrying about falling asleep complicates matters, creating a sense of dread in the evenings and therefore more anxiety.



Anxiety and panic when trying to fall asleep

In some cases, anxiety at the point of trying to go to sleep may be the main issue. Some people may experience intense worry, physical symptoms of anxiety, and even panic attacks when trying to rest. **Where this is the case, always consult your GP.**

There can be many unique reasons why this happens. One of which could be experiencing an increased sense of isolation at night and therefore lack of safety. In addition, those who are extremely busy and under persistent stress in the day may find that distressing thoughts catch up with them when no longer concentrating on daily duties. Read more about this [here](#).

What helps?

- **Keep track of your sleeping habits** and reflect on what your difficulties are. For example, some people may feel unsafe in complete darkness and silence, therefore may feel comforted by low-level lighting, sleep-friendly music, or white noise. Conversely, removing all distractions, for example using a sleep mask and earplugs maybe they key for others. Ultimately, try and figure out what the issue is.
- **Make your bedroom a safe, stress-free zone.** Where possible, do NOT work in your room or rearrange your room in the evening to disguise your working area (ie, tidying away your laptop/equipment, placing a screen to disguise your desk, etc).
- **Establish or reinforce a relaxing and rewarding bedtime routine.** Try and make it a time of day to look forward to. Have a loose set bedtime, make sure you have sufficient winding downtime before you plan to sleep, Avoid caffeine, social media, or bright screens (you can set a night mode on most devices). Likewise, plan a morning routine/ritual that you can also look forward to. The Sleep Foundation has more suggestions [here](#).
- **Don't try and force sleep** if you are feeling anxious or alert. Try and occupy yourself with something relaxing (i.e. reading, meditation, writing, prayer, or watching something familiar and comforting) until you feel more tired.
- **GET HELP** - if you have tried to make changes, however, are still struggling, speak to your **GP** or Family Doctor. Support offered by your GP may include a referral for talking therapies to address anxiety and/or medication to help with sleep. You can also speak to your GP or a pharmacist about safe over-the-counter sleep aids.