



**Royal Devon  
University Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Session 3:**

## **Sleep**



## Sleep

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Sleep difficulties are common in people with chronic fatigue.

Initially, your body will need more sleep as you recover from an acute illness or stressful event, but after this initial period, longer term disruption in sleep patterns can occur. However, chronic fatigue is not directly caused by poor quality sleep, and it is worth noting that fatigue and sleepiness are not the same thing.

Often sleep is unrefreshing and the routines of sleeping and waking are disrupted. Improving the quality of your sleep and re-establishing a sleep / wake routine can be an important factor in managing your fatigue and other symptoms.

### Common sleep difficulties

- Over sleeping, including day time sleeping.
- Not sleeping enough.
- Dysregulated sleep patterns.
- Not being able to wake up easily / waking unrefreshed.
- Waking frequently in the night.
- Being disturbed by pain / restless legs.



## What influences sleep?

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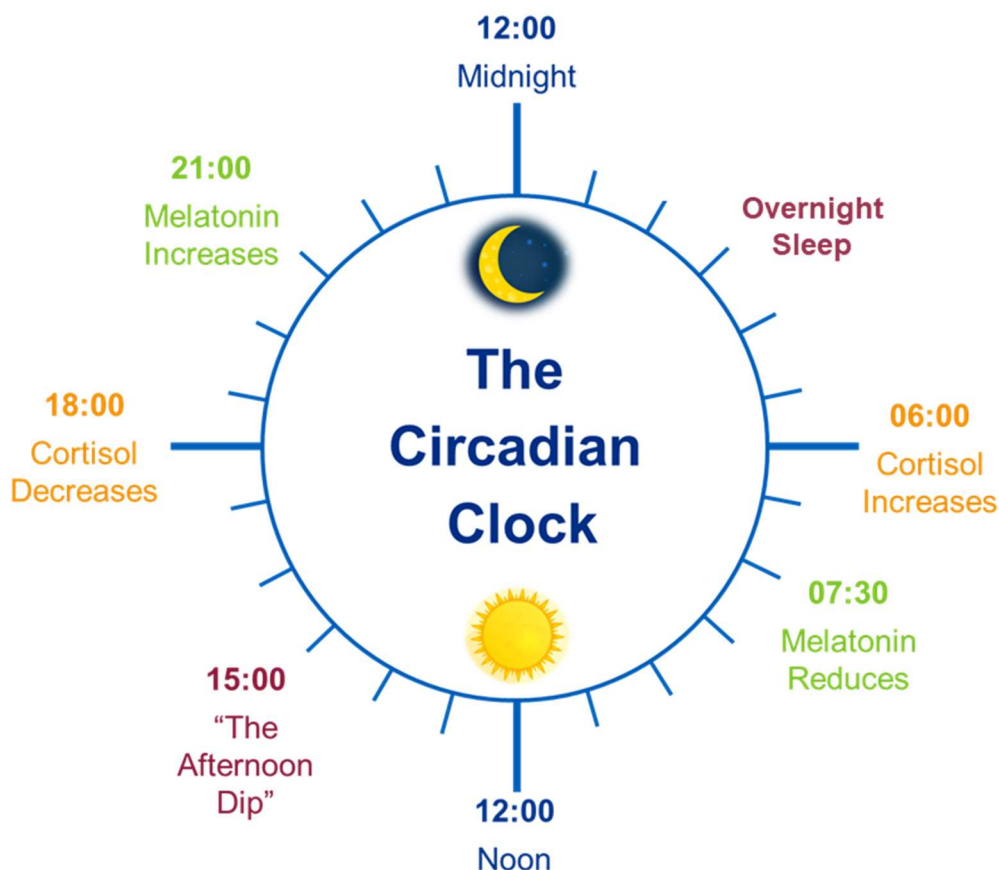
Sleep is an essential part of our 24-hour cycle and can be influenced by both external factors and internal processes.

### The circadian rhythm – the internal body clock

The circadian rhythm is an internally driven cycle that rises and falls during the 24-hour day. It helps you to fall asleep at night and wakes you up in the morning.

Light cues to the brain are very important in regulating sleep pattern. This means the body needs daylight or bright light first thing in the morning to help regulate your body clock, and equally at the end of the day darkness helps with getting your brain ready for sleep.

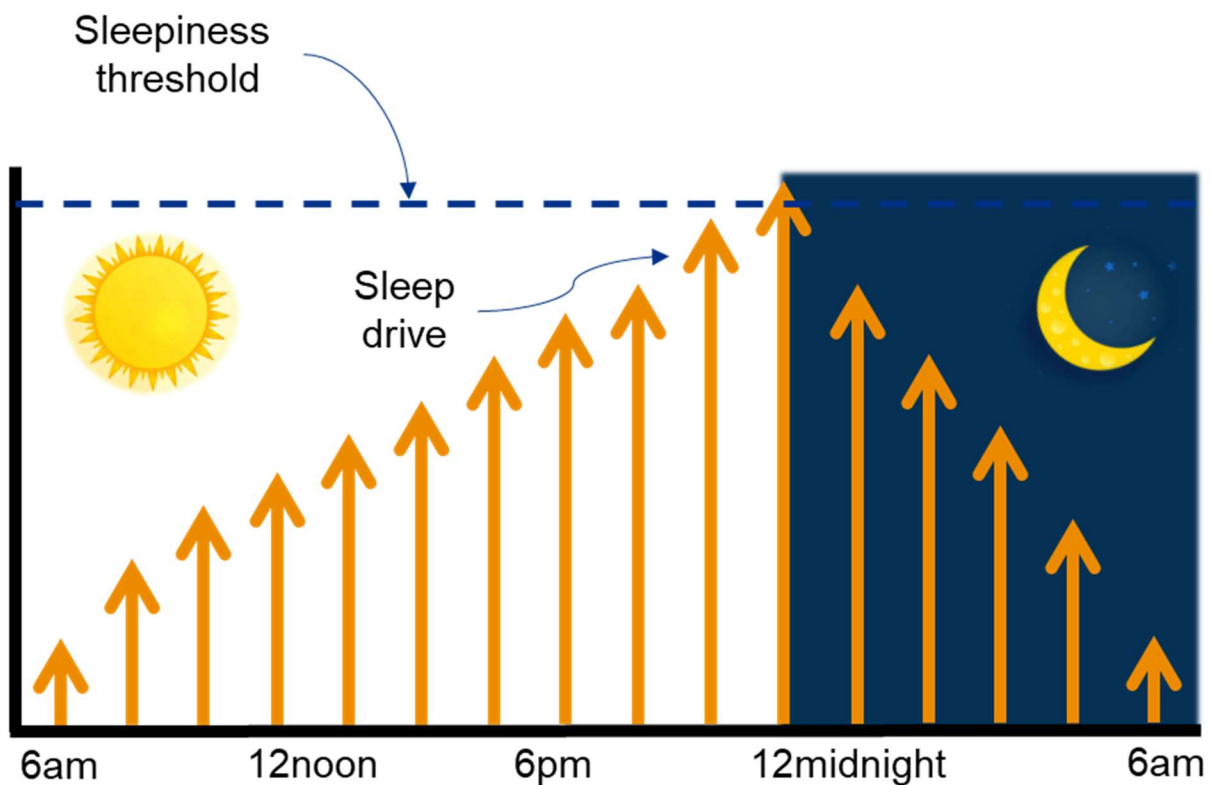
Another factor that helps regulate your circadian rhythm is establishing a daily routine; including when you eat, when you wake, and when you start to wind down before going to bed.



## The sleep drive

The sleep drive is a person's need for sleep. As the day goes on, the drive builds in the body which influences the feeling of sleepiness.

This sleep drive is normally at its strongest 16 hours after you last slept, therefore the longer a person stays awake, the stronger their sleep drive becomes. It is important to note that sleeping during the day (napping) for long periods of time can interrupt the build-up of the sleep drive. Caffeine is also a stimulant and can reduce sleepiness and the sleep drive.



## The stages of sleep

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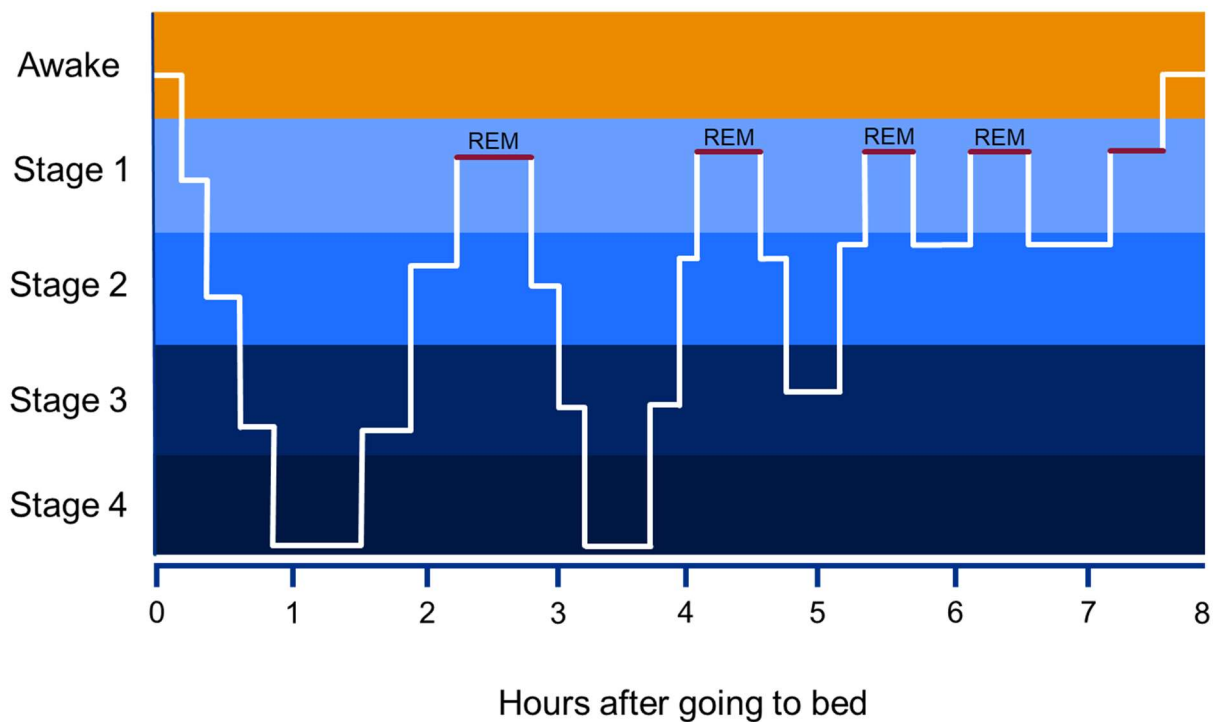
A person typically goes through four to six 90-minute cycles per night, and it is normal to briefly wake once per cycle.

**Stage 1** – Where a person is first falling asleep. It can be easy to wake at this stage.

**Stage 2** – The body starts to slow down, temperature drops, muscles relax, respiratory and heart rate lower.

**Stages 3 & 4** – Known as deep sleep. Important for physical restoration and repair.

**REM** – Brain activity increases, nearing being awake. This stage can be important for cognitive functions such as memory, learning and creativity. If you wake during this stage you are more likely to remember your dreams.



## Sleep hygiene strategies

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Sleep hygiene is a term used to describe good sleep habits. Adopting helpful sleep hygiene strategies can support the body's natural ability to fall asleep, as well as potentially reaching the deeper stages of sleep and achieving a restful night's sleep.

### Lifestyle factors

- The body needs **early exposure to light** in the morning to regulate waking. Light helps decrease melatonin and can improve alertness. Daylight lamps or sunrise alarm clocks can be an alternative way to access light exposure, particularly on darker winter mornings.
- **Limit daytime sleeping** (napping) when possible. Naps can interrupt the sleep drive, which can then potentially impact night time sleep. For some, a nap is needed. If this is the case, consider reducing the nap gradually to 30 minutes only and attempt to take this before 3pm (Sleep Foundation 2022).
- **Dealing with worries before sleep** allows you to process what may disturb your sleep that night. Have a note pad by the side of your bed to write down any unhelpful thoughts or worries that occur during the night. It may be helpful to allow yourself a 'worry time' earlier in the afternoon. Ask yourself what is in your control and make a plan for this. For worries that are not in your control, reassure yourself that you have done everything you can to resolve the situation.
- It is better to **limit caffeinated drinks** such as tea, coffee, energy drinks and alcohol because these act as stimulants. Avoiding eating a meal within three hours of going to bed, allows enough time to properly digest food. A milky drink or a small snack before bed can also be helpful if you find you wake in the night hungry.
- Consider the **timings of medication**. Some medications can ease pain which may prevent interrupted sleep.
- Establishing a **regular and consistent wake up time** can support in regulating sleep patterns, and helps to build the sleep drive.

## Bedroom environment

- It is good to consider the **lighting** of your bedroom, as light may make it difficult to sleep. It may be beneficial to consider the use of black out curtains or blinds, or an eye mask if tolerable.
- **Limiting noise** can be helpful in achieving a restful sleep. Some people may choose to use ear plugs at night if tolerable. Others may prefer to listen to low level music, a podcast or a guided relaxation to aid sleep. Use a timer to ensure your device turns off after a set time.
- **Temperature** is an important aspect to consider in regards to your sleep quality. For a comfortable sleep, the recommended temperature is between 15.6 – 20 degrees Celsius (Sleep Foundation 2022).
- Having a **comfortable bed** and **mattress** can really enhance sleep quality.
- Having a **calm** and **clutter-free bedroom** is beneficial for mind and body. Visual clutter can cause overwhelm to the senses and cause stress. Disorganised items in your bedroom may reinforce the sensation of having too many unfinished jobs that may need completing.
- **Limiting distractions** such as external factors, including noise or pets, can aid restful sleep.
- Attempt to keep the bedroom for **sleep** and **intimacy only**, to ensure you can associate your bed with sleep.

## Creating a wind down routine

Having a relaxing evening routine can have a positive effect on your ability to go to sleep.

- Start 90 mins before bedtime.
- Get ready for bed (e.g. cleaning teeth / putting pyjamas on).
- Engage in relaxing activities.
- Avoid screen time (not just blue light).
- Limit distractions.
- Lower lights.
- Warm milky drink and / or a light snack.
- Going to bed when sleepy.

## Managing sleep frustrations

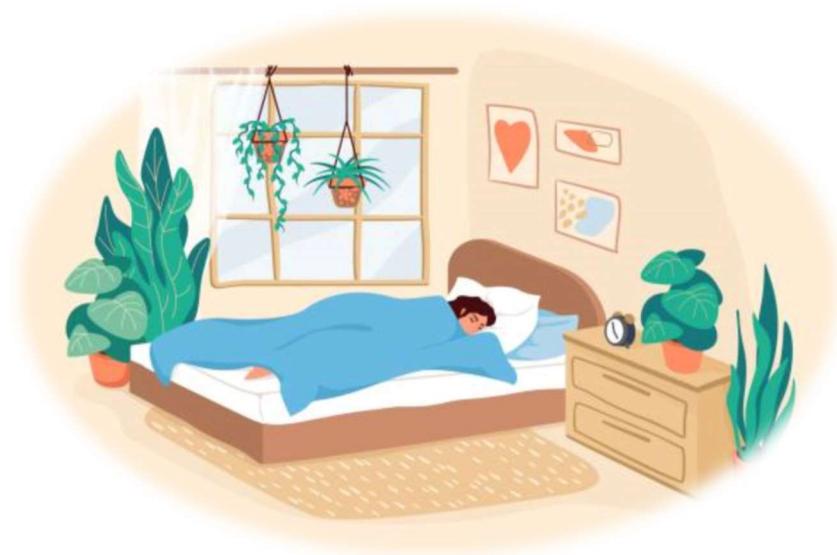
Frustrations over not sleeping can lead to increase in tension and stress.

- It can be more effective to focus on **relaxation**, rather than the expectation of falling asleep immediately. Meditation, breathing and other relaxation techniques can help.
- Visualise a **calm** and **peaceful scene**, focusing on the details.
- Try repeating a **neutral word** in your head, such as “the”, every few seconds.
- **Leave** your bedroom **after 20-30 minutes** if you **haven't fallen asleep** – engage in calming activities, rest and relaxation in low light before trying to sleep again.

## Three Good Things

Prior to sleep, it can be helpful to consider three good things from your day, or things you are grateful for (however small). This has been shown to have a positive effect on mood and sleep (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Focusing on this practice also makes it harder for your brain to think about unhelpful or negative things that could disturb your sleep.





## Reflections on session 3

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1. What information from Session 3 (Sleep) did you find most useful?

2. Consider the sleep hygiene strategies you could introduce?

Lifestyle Factors	Bedroom Environment

3. Give yourself an opportunity to browse on 'Insight Timer' (or a similar mobile phone app) to find a relaxation that works for you.