



# Foothold

Supporting engineers

## **Your questions are answered by Dr Neil Stanley, Director of Sleep Science at Sleepstation.**

Dr Neil is an independent sleep expert, involved in sleep research for more than 38 years. He started his career at the Neurosciences Division of the RAF and later became Director of Sleep Research at The University of Surrey.



**Q: When you're very tired after intensive activity (for example running a marathon) it's difficult to sleep well. Why is this?**

**A:** Physical exhaustion isn't the same as being sleepy. Your body temperature and heart rate need to return to baseline before sleep.

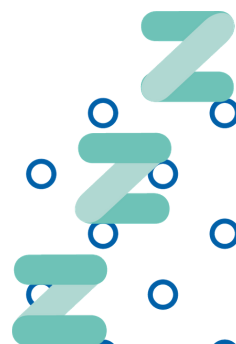
**Q: I've read studies quoting 8 hours as the best amount of sleep (also the 4+4hrs sleep split throughout the day) whilst some recent ones have said 7 hours is optimal for the longevity of life. What's your opinion on the best amount of sleep for us overworked engineers?**

**A:** Sleep should be in one continuous block at night and 4+4 isn't advocated by any sleep expert that I'm aware of. Teenagers need 9-9.5 hours and adults need between 6 and 10 hours per night. But there's no magic number of hours - it's about getting the right amount of sleep for you.

**Q: How does a non-IET member access this sleepstation?**

**A:** You can access Sleepstation via our website, [sleepstation.org.uk](https://sleepstation.org.uk). You will be given the option to request an NHS referral which will need to be approved by your GP. Alternatively, you can choose to pay privately and gain instant access to the programme.

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**Q: Does it matter what kind of sleep you get? I dream a lot and have very little deep sleep. Is this bad?**

A: How do you know you're getting very little deep sleep? We do get less deep sleep as we age, but if you're basing this on sleep tracker information, you should know that they're very inaccurate in measuring the different stages of sleep. If you repeatedly wake up during dreaming sleep, you may feel you're having a lot of REM but it's a relatively fixed proportion of the night - around 20-25%.

**Q: What's the best way to cope with jet lag?**

A: If it's light where you are, try to stay awake and if it's dark, try to sleep. Aim to eat your meals at the correct local time.

**Q: As a partner of an IET member, can I join Sleepstation?**

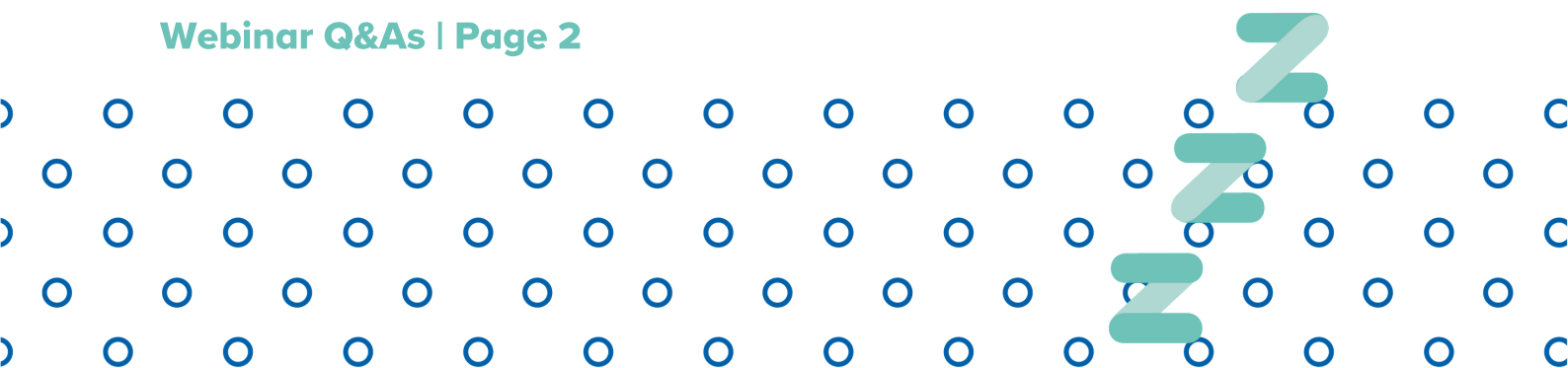
A: Yes you can! Please visit <https://www.sleepstation.org.uk/foothold/> where you can register for free.

**Q: Do you have any tips for going back to sleep if you wake too early in the morning?**

A: If you feel awake and alert when you wake, why not get up? If not, then like at any other time, you need a relaxed body and quiet mind to fall asleep.

**Q: The fear of being cancer-prone made me not sleep well. But I used the free Sleepstation service and it helped me to have better sleep and exercise too.**

A: Thank you for your message. With regard to your sleep being disturbed by fear of cancer, you may find our article on thought blocking helpful. You can find it here: [www.sleepstation.org.uk/articles/sleep-tips/thought-blocking/](https://www.sleepstation.org.uk/articles/sleep-tips/thought-blocking/)



**Q: In the last webinar, I saw a diagram showing 7 hours was ideal for women, as 8 and 9 hours increased the risk of cancer. Is this correct?**

**A:** The data showed an increased risk of sleeping a different number of hours. But as your sleep need is largely genetically determined, the ideal is to get the right amount of sleep for you. There are no magic, or ideal, hours of sleep for the population, only for the individual.

**Q: What's the recommended minimum hours of sleep a child and an adult should get?**

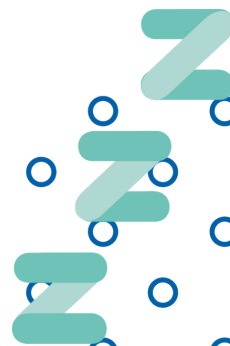
**A:** A newborn needs roughly 16-20 hours, a ten year- old around 10 hours, a teenager 9-9.5 hours and an adult somewhere between 6-10 hours.

**Q: Do any of the well-known herbal remedies, such as chamomile or valerian actually work?**

**A:** There's little, if any, scientific evidence for herbal remedies. The best data available is regarding valerian, which shows a small benefit to sleep. This is probably due to a reduction in anxiety. However, there are no long-term safety data.

**Q: I have a 21-year-old daughter with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Aspergers) who also has a functional bowel disorder and a number of other complications. No matter how she tries, she drifts off to sleep between 4 am and 2 pm. Is this common with people with ASD?**

**A:** ASD can lead to sleep outside the normal night-time period. Encouraging routines around sleep, as well as at meal times, can help.



**Q: Is circadian rhythm lost or misaligned in midsummer, or in Norway with 24-hour daylight? Should wake-up times change as dawn time changes?**

**A:** Our bodies are governed by our circadian rhythms which run for just over 24 hours. This gives us the flexibility to cope with the lengthening and shortening of the day across the seasons. Although light and dark are important signals, our circadian rhythms are in fact intrinsic. But from an evolutionary point of view, the increased day length in summer means we can 'work' more than we can in winter. So, we would wake up earlier and go to bed later to take advantage of this.

**Q: When suffering from Chronic Fatigue, sleep doesn't refresh the affected person. How can the patient achieve beneficial sleep?**

**A:** CF patients have something called alpha/delta sleep which means that their sleep may not be refreshing. There's a drug that is licenced in the US that can help both the pain and the sleep problems.

**Q: Reporting sleeping problems/insomnia to GPs and psychiatrists often leads to the prescription of sleeping pills. What's your advice when faced with this situation - take or not take?**

**A:** The current NICE guidelines say that sleeping tablets should not routinely be used. Instead, cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia, as offered by Sleepstation, is the first-line therapy. With regards to taking or not taking sleeping tablets, that decision must be made on the basis of the risks/benefits and can only be decided by yourself in consultation with your GP.

If you're a member of the engineering community and would like some personalised support, our sleep improvement programme may just be what you need. It's all the science-backed support of a sleep clinic but completely online and at your own pace. [Sign up here.](#)

