



Webinar Q&A – How to Improve Sleep

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: Does exercise in the evening disturb sleep?

A: Science has shown that you can exercise before bedtime! Just make sure you return your heart rate and body temperature back to baseline before trying to sleep.

Q: How can I control my body clock in the winter when there isn't much daylight?

A: Get natural light as early as possible in the day. You could also use a light box (10,000lux blue light).

Q: I stopped smoking cigarettes but still use nicotine replacement tablets. How does this affect my sleep?

A: Any nicotine can affect sleep. But nicotine withdrawal can also cause problems. Timing matters here - work out when to take the product you're using so it works best for you.

Q: Is there any evidence that reduction in blue light from screens can help sleep? Should I get a blue light filter for my phones and computer screens?

A: Any light at all before bedtime can disturb sleep. So blue light filters solve only one part of a much bigger problem.



Q: I can't get back to sleep after waking up at 2-3am. How do I switch off the mind?

A: If you haven't fallen back to sleep after 20 mins or so, you should get up and go to another room. Do something relaxing and go back to bed when you feel sleepy again.

Q: What's the impact of fluctuating sleep patterns? For example, I go through weeks when 4 or 5 hours of sleep feels enough, but then I crash and need much more sleep for the next week or so.

A: The body craves routine - this is the best way of improving your sleep. Stick to the same wake and sleep times each day, including weekends.

Q: Is sex before sleep beneficial?

A: It can be a nice way of relaxing before bedtime!

Q: What's the best sleeping position - sides or back, with a pillow or without?

A: You move and change positions 12-20 times a night so there is no 'best' position as such. Whatever feels comfortable and works for you.

Q: Would you recommend taking a nap in the afternoon?

A: A short 20-minute nap can be very beneficial. But any more than that may reduce the pressure to sleep at night.

Q: I never remember my dreams - is this normal?

A: Not remembering your dreams just means you are a good sleeper! You may be experiencing sleep state misperception, where you may be asleep without you realising it.



Q: I'm retired from work – should I still use an alarm to wake up?

A: Keeping a constant wake up time is beneficial to your sleep quality. It doesn't have to be the same as when you were working!

Q: Is it true that an hour of sleep before midnight is worth two after midnight?

A: It's a myth, related to medieval monks and midnight prayers. But it's true, however, that the best sleep happens in the first third of the night.

Q: I wake up too early and can't go back to sleep. How can I extend my sleep period beyond 5 hours?

A: You may in fact just be a short sleeper! It depends on how you feel during the day. If you feel fine, there's no need to change what works for you.

Q: Any tips for how to manage a sleep routine with a newborn? My wife and I are struggling with not having more than 3-4hrs of sleep at any one time, and it's having an impact on staying alert during the working day.

A: Newborns have no awareness of the difference between day and night. The good news is that this comes with age, so be patient.

Q: Is Uberman/polyphasic cycle a healthy mode of sleeping?

A: No, this is unnatural nonsense.



Q: How can I cut down on the times I go to the loo at night?

A: Getting up to pee once a night is perfectly normal but more than that could indicate a problem. Try to cut down on fluids.

Q: What's your view on wake-up lights like Lumie?

A: They're expensive gimmicks.

Q: What if you wake up and just do not feel refreshed?

A: If you're sleeping as long as you need and this is still happening, have a look at what's disturbing the quality, not quantity of your sleep.

Q: How do you open the conversation with your partner that your sleep needs are different to theirs?

A: I'd suggest a nice meal, bottle of wine and doing it in a non-judgemental way. Not "you have ruined my night and ruined my life"!

Q: What do you think of CBD oil as a sleep aid?

A: There's no evidence of a benefit for sleep but there is some for anxiety.

Q: I'm struggling to stay asleep, despite not having any external disturbances like noise. What could be affecting this and what can I do to improve the situation?

A: There will be something that is disturbing you. It may be internal - pain, needing to pee, or something else.

Q: What do you make of reading before bed?

A: It can be relaxing! If it works for you, don't change it.



Q: How do you know what your optimal sleep duration is?

A: It's the amount of sleep that allows you to feel awake and alert during the day.

Q: Excessive dreaming almost daily leaves my mind exhausted during the day. Any suggestions?

A: Improving your sleep will reduce your experience of dreaming so it won't affect you as much.

Q: Can I alter my biological sleep cycle to be able to sleep early and wake up early?

A: Your sleep cycle is genetically determined and so there is very little you can do to change it.

Q: When is the best time of day to undertake acupuncture to improve sleep?

A: As with many activities, there's no ideal time - just one that works for you.

Q: I am a light sleeper and I use noise-cancelling earbuds to help me get to sleep - they work for me. What do you think about the prolonged use of items like this?

A: If it works for you then it's not a problem at all.

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