- Sleep

Sleep: DECODED

Dr David Garley, director of The Better Sleep Clinic, is an expert in diagnosing and treating sleep disorders. To find out more, visit thebettersleepclinic.co.uk

In this busy world, a good night's rest can seem impossible. Luckily, we've got expert help on hand to fix it!



How important is sleep?

"Sleep is absolutely essential. You can survive longer without food than you can without sleep. One of the most fundamental models of health is called 'The Three Pillars' which is exercise, nutrition and sleep. Sleep is an entire third of this fundamental idea of health."

Is the power of sleep underestimated?

"Yes, and I think there are good reasons for this. Particularly if your sleep problems creep in gradually, there comes a point when you are really not sleeping well but you have almost got used to this degree of sleep deprivation. Often it is only after crisis point is reached and people seek help, and they get their sleep back on track, that they realise how powerful sleep really is."

WORDS: CLAIRE MACAULAY IMAGES: STOCK.ADOBE.COM

How do you know if you're not getting a good night's sleep?

"One way of thinking about this is looking to see if you have lost control of sleep – either you can't sleep at night, or you can't stop sleeping during the day. Another way is by thinking about the role of sleep in supporting daytime function. If you are struggling with your daytime function (to think, to remember, to have energy, to be in a good mood) then these are potential signs that your sleep is not as good as it could be."



Why do we find it difficult to sleep?

"Often through not allowing enough opportunity for sleep. Our lives are so busy that we end up going to bed late or waking up too early, so our sleep window is cut short. There are also several sleep disorders which are a lot more common than you might think. Insomnia affects 10% of the adult population and obstructive sleep apnea can affect 10 to 15% of people over the age of 50."



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How many hours should we aim for each night?

"The number that often gets thrown around is eight hours, but this is more of a population average. Most adults need somewhere between seven and nine hours of sleep. How many hours of sleep you need is very much a personal thing."

Are sleep problems becoming more common?

"Yes, I think from an insomnia point of view, they are. I think technology is a large part of this – it is a lot easier to bring your work home with you now and if this is playing on your mind then sleep can be more difficult to come by. Also smartphones have clearly gained their popularity through being incredibly engaging, but if this leads to an inability to 'switch off' then again this can interfere with sleep."

At what point should you seek help from professionals?

"If you feel that your sleep is not where you want it to be, and this is having an impact on your quality of life then I would say that is the point that you should speak to a professional."

What kind of issues do you address in the clinic?

"We manage a range of different sleep disorders. Certainly, for insomnia this is often associated with work stress. Other workplace issues that can lead to poor sleep or jet lag and working night shifts. There are some medical conditions that are associated with poor sleep too; most mental health conditions have the potential to disrupt sleep, and we see a lot of this."

Is bedtime a factor in a good sleep?

"The answer to this relates to what's called your 'chronotype'. Broadly speaking, this is whether you're a morning or night owl, but this is a bit of an oversimplification as most people are either vaguely morning type or vaguely evening type! There isn't any difference in the quality of sleep you get do to your chronotype, however what is an absolute fact is that morning larks fit better with society. If you are a night owl and you would rather be sleeping until 9 or 10am, then you will find that in order to fit in with school university or work that you will have to cut short your natural sleep time and make yourself get up at 7 or 8am, which can lead to a degree of sleep deprivation."

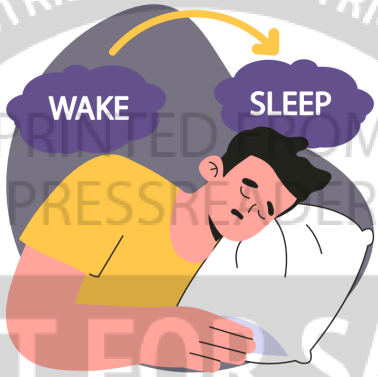
David's Tips for Sleeping Better

1 Make sure you have enough opportunity for sleep. Often people don't struggle for sleep, they just don't give themselves enough opportunity to do it.

2 Structure your day to reinforce the 'waking parts' to allow sleep to come more naturally at night. This can involve getting out into the sunshine and doing moderate exercise, particularly in the first half of the day.

3 Consider a wind-down routine. Trying to go from our active lives to sleep in one step is sometimes a bit ambitious and having 20 or 30 minutes where you just try to relax before going into bed can make all the difference.

4 Interestingly, the more you try to sleep, the less likely it is to happen, which can have a paradoxical effect when you're seeking out helpful information. We feel our resources tread that line in a balanced way – you can find out more at **thebettersleepclinic.co.uk**



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