



# How to sleep well with pain

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Produced by *Live Well with Pain*, a partnership of pain specialists and people with lived experience of pain.

*Live Well with Pain* produces a range of trusted self-management tools and resources for people with pain and the healthcare professionals who support them.

All resources are available free online at [livewellwithpain.co.uk](http://livewellwithpain.co.uk)

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**“I used to feel defeated by my pain. It completely controlled my life. But the skills I’ve learned through the Ten Footsteps programme mean I can actually start to enjoy life again. Thank you *Live Well with Pain!*”**

*Feedback from a person using the Live Well with Pain website*

**“Live Well with Pain is such a useful resource – I share it with patients every day!”**

*GP, Tyneside*

If you’re living with pain and struggling with sleep then you’re not alone. It’s very common for people with persistent pain to have difficulties getting to sleep or staying asleep. However, recent research shows that by adjusting what you do during the day, as well as at night, it is possible to achieve a healthier sleep pattern . . .

## Why can’t I sleep?

It’s likely that there are a number of causes of your sleep difficulties. Here are six triggers often found by people living with pain:



**Activity:** Do you experience any of these triggers?  
Circle the ones that affect you.

## A vicious cycle

You have probably discovered that poor sleep can have some unhelpful effects on your day-to-day life.

After a broken night's sleep you may find:

- **it's harder to concentrate**
- **you are short tempered with other people**
- **your mood is low**

It's very common for people to find that poor sleep makes their pain seem worse. They can find themselves in a vicious cycle where pain makes sleeping difficult, and poor sleep worsens pain.

The really good news is that there are lots of ways to improve your sleep.

## The good news

Thanks to recent research, we now know that sleeping well with pain is possible, with a different approach and maybe a few new skills.

Over the next few pages we will share with you some ideas and techniques that other people living with pain have found helpful.

We're going to look at **five areas of your life** and suggest some simple changes that you can make to your activities and routines.

Some things you can try out straight away; others may need a bit more thought and planning. So we're also going to show you how to set some sleep well goals and create a plan so that you can get going.

There's a form to complete at the end of the booklet to help you make these changes.

### The five areas

There are lots of changes you can make to help you sleep well.

Over a period of five to six weeks these can make a huge difference. Here are the five areas we are going to look at:



# 1 Your daily routines

To understand why daily routines matter it's useful to know a bit about how sleep is controlled by your body. Two systems in your body are important: your **body clock** and your **sleep drive**.

### What is your body clock?

Your body clock is a 24-hour internal clock that helps your body to be alert or sleepy at different times of the day or night. Your body clock needs to be 'set' regularly. The things that help to set your body clock are sunlight and daily activities. If you spend a lot of time resting indoors because of your pain, then your body clock can get confused.

### What is your sleep drive?

Your sleep drive is at its lowest when you first wake up. It then increases as you spend more and more hours awake. Eventually, after you have been awake for a long period (usually around 16 hours) you will have a strong need for sleep.

### Think of them as your friends

Imagine your body clock and sleep drive as your 'sleep friends.' They are there to help you to sleep well, so you need to keep them in balance. Here's how . . .

**Get into a regular routine.** Go to bed, get up, eat meals and do activities around the same times every day. Try to stick to this no matter whether it's a weekday or a weekend – and whatever kind of sleep you had the previous night.

### Avoid taking naps during the day.

This can be difficult – you may feel drowsy because of your medicines or because you've had a restless night. If you feel you absolutely 'must' nap, then keep it short – less than an hour.

**Avoid using the room where you sleep to rest in the daytime.** If you need to take some time out because of your pain, then try to find another place to rest – or do a relaxation activity.

### How much sleep do I need?

A 'normal' night's sleep can be anywhere between 5 and 10 hours.

It's a myth that we all need 8 hours sleep – this is an average. We all have different sleep times.

How much sleep you need will vary and depends on your age and your situation. We need less sleep as we get older: around 6 to 6½ hours is a typical sleep time.

Sleeping more than you need can make moving difficult when you wake up.

## 2 Your activity levels

Like many people with persistent pain, you may be avoiding physical activity because you are worried it will make your pain worse.

These fears are normal and understandable – when you live with pain, the last thing you want to do is aggravate it further! It may be encouraging for you to know that getting fit and staying active is actually good for your pain and for your sleep.

**Here are some of the ways physical activity can help your sleep:**

- You'll feel less sleepy in the day
- It increases your drive for sleep at night
- It can ease stress and tension
- It helps to keep your 'body clock' in balance

To start or maintain a regular activity routine, there are a number of things that you can do:

**Learn the skill of pacing.** Pacing is a really useful skill as it guides you to do the level of activity that is right for your body. When you pace your activity, you take a break before pain or tiredness forces you to stop.

**Do physical activities that you enjoy.** Quite simply, if you enjoy what you're doing then you're more likely to keep it up. This could be anything from taking a morning walk through to swimming, playing badminton or gentle Tai Chi or Yoga.

### Try to do some activities outside.

Being in the daylight during the day helps your body clock to be in balance with day and night time patterns. Spending time outdoors can help reduce stress too.

### Avoid energetic activities shortly before sleep.

Activity late in the day 'wakes up' your body and so it can lead to problems falling asleep or staying asleep. To help with sleep, the best time to be active is late in the afternoon or early evening.

### What kinds of physical activity should I do?

It helps if your activity routine includes:

**Regular stretching.** This will help to loosen tight muscles, ligaments and joints, increase your flexibility, improve your posture and help you lie more easily in bed.

**Strengthening.** This will help you to stand and walk for longer, get out of chairs more easily and walk up stairs. It will improve your balance and reduce your chance of falls.

**Stamina activities.** These will help you to do things for longer without more pain or tiredness.

## 3 Your food and drink choices

There are many simple changes you can make to your eating and drinking habits in the evening to help yourself sleep well. Here are some suggestions for you to explore . . .

**Avoid caffeine in the evening.** Caffeinated drinks, like tea, coffee and cola can have a stimulating effect on your body. Usually this lasts for around 4-5 hours. So it's best to not to drink any caffeine from late afternoon onwards to help you sleep well. Lots of things contain caffeine, such as chocolate, fizzy drinks and even some medicines. So it makes sense to read the labels of anything you eat or drink in the evening. Check your medicines information sheet about effects on sleep too

**Try not to drink too much just before you go to bed.** It may help to limit yourself to sips of water if you are thirsty before bed or in the night. Remember, too much fluid could cause you to wake up and head for the toilet.

**Avoid drinking alcohol late in the evening.** Alcohol can get in the way of a good night's sleep. It has a dehydrating

effect which can cause you to wake up feeling thirsty. It can also interrupt the pattern of your sleep. It turns out that after drinking alcohol, you sleep more lightly and wake up more easily, especially in the second part of the night.

**Eat your main meal earlier in the evening and have a small snack just before you go to bed.** If you have an empty stomach when you go to bed you might wake up hungry in the night. On the other hand, if you eat a big meal late at night then your body may be too busy digesting your food or coping with heartburn to rest easily.

**If you are awake in the night, avoid snacking.** Snacking at night could be training your body to wake up as it expects food. Try a soothing drink like herbal teas, mint, chamomile or warm milk drink instead.

### Activity: what changes to your food and drink are you going to make?



Foods and drinks I will avoid in the evenings:

I will replace them with these:

## 4 Your night-time routines

The things that you do leading up to bedtime can help your mind and body get ready to sleep well. We tell children this and yet we forget it applies to adults too!

Getting into a regular wind-down routine will help your body to relax. It can soothe any worries you may be having about sleep in the night ahead. Making sure that your bedroom is 'fit for sleep' is important too. Here are some ideas to explore:

### Follow a wind-down routine every evening

Start by setting a wind-down time around 1 to 1½ hours before bed. After this time, do things that help you to relax. This might be taking a bath, watching TV, listening to music or reading a book/magazine.

### Only go to bed when it's time to sleep

Ideally only go to bed when it's time to sleep as this will help you adapt to your new body clock and sleep drive routine. Don't go to bed earlier to watch TV in bed, go on the internet or mobile phone. If you do non-sleep activities in bed then your brain is learning that it is okay to be awake and alert in bed.

### Get the temperature right

Being too hot can cause restlessness and being too cold can make it difficult to sleep. Explore making changes to your bedding to find the best mix of layers to sleep well. Try a fan or heater on a timer if your bedroom temperature seems to be a problem.

### Make sure your room is as dark and quiet as possible

When it's dark, our bodies release melatonin which helps us to relax and fall asleep. You can block out light from outside by using blackout curtains or blinds. It can also help to cover up any light sources such as alarm clocks. Some people find it helps to wear an eye mask and put in ear plugs.



## Planning a regular sleep pattern

This is a technique that many people with sleep find useful. It helps to keep your body clock and your sleep drive in balance. Here are the four steps:

- 1 First, think about how many hours of sleep you need. Remember, everyone is different. Try to think about how many hours you slept when you last had a 'good night'.**
- 2 Next decide what time you want to get up every morning.**
- 3 Now take away your sleep hours from your getting up time. This is your new time to go to bed to sleep.**
- 4 From now on, make sure that you go to bed at this time every night. And get up at the same time every morning.**

Getting into a regular routine can be very tricky at first. Try not to be tempted to go to bed earlier if you feel tired or press the snooze button on your morning alarm. By keeping this routine for several weeks, most people find they begin to fall asleep more quickly and easily and wake up less during the night.

Once you are used to this new sleeping pattern, you can make small changes. For instance, you may want to try to increase your sleeping hours a little by going to bed 30 minutes earlier. Just make sure you don't make too many changes all at once. Give your body clock time to get used to the new routine before you change it again.

good night's sleep 7 hrs  
get up time 6.30am  
6.30am - 7 hrs = 11.30pm  
So go to bed by 11.30pm to  
get a good night's sleep

## 5 Helping your mind and body to rest

Making sure that your bedroom is 'fit for sleep' can make a big difference. Sometimes you may still find that it is difficult to relax in bed as your mind is racing or your body is tense.

When you are living with pain, a good bed and the right sleeping position is important. It gives your spine support and will help your body to rest. Learning and regularly using simple relaxation skills helps soothe your mind. Here are some suggestions for you to think about:

### Make sure you have a bed that's comfortable for you

To find out more about beds and mattresses visit [www.sleepcouncil.org.uk](http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk)

To find a comfortable position, you may need more cushions or pillows so your body feels relaxed (eg: contoured neck or knee pillows).

### Use relaxation techniques to help you feel calm and quieten your mind

It can be very common to lie in bed worrying about how much sleep you are going to get. Distracting and calming your mind can really help with this – try out some of our suggestions on the right to discover which work best for you.

### Avoid checking the time during the night

Some people find that they keep checking the time if they can't get to sleep or if they wake up in the night. This can increase their worrying and make it harder to sleep. If you tend to do this, then cover your clock or put it away from your bed so that you can't see it.

### If you wake up in the night – don't struggle

It's very common to feel frustrated or worried if you wake up in the night – letting go of this struggle is a way of being kind to yourself. People find that different techniques help with this. Some people use relaxation techniques, other people find it helps to get out of bed after 15–20 minutes and do something that is calming in a different room. It can also help to simply lie in bed and remind yourself that 'sleep will come when it's ready.'

#### Activity:

Now circle one suggestion you will try

## Simple relaxation techniques

Anyone can learn relaxation techniques with a bit of guidance and some regular practice. There are lots of techniques you could try. Here are a few that people living with pain have said can be helpful:

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

This is a set of exercises that you can do when you are lying in bed. It involves deliberately tensing your muscles and then relaxing them and noticing how the tension melts away. There is a recommended sequence to follow, starting with one foot and moving gradually up your body to your face.

### Belly breathing

This involves learning to breathe slowly and deeply from your belly. To practice, put a hand on your stomach and feel it rise as you breathe in. Then relax your chest and shoulders as you breath out. Concentrate on your breathing and try to slow down your breaths using counting. This is then repeated for ten times or more.

### Visual imagery

Choose peaceful or soothing images to focus on or run through a soothing scene

in your mind, such as walking under trees or by a river.

### Soothing sounds

Some people find it helpful to play soothing sounds in the background to help them to relax in bed.

It's possible to buy sleep sound machines, play CDs or download apps that play rhythmic sounds such as waves on the sea shore, a melody or even 'white noise'.



# Putting it into practice – creating your own sleep well plan

Now that you have some ideas about things that can help you to sleep well, it's time to make a sleep well plan.

Making a plan will help you to focus on a few goals at a time rather than trying to achieve too many things at once. Share it with someone, or write it down, as this can help make it realistic so you stick with it.

Over the page you'll find a blank plan for you to use.

Before you begin, have a look at the example on the right. It suggests examples of the kinds of things you could write in your own plan.

But it's important that the ones you add are right for you (see the 'REST test' below).

Sometimes it's easier to make your plan with someone else. Why not ask your pain management team, health coach, social prescriber or friend to help you come up with a plan that works for you?

It normally takes a few weeks for your new activities and routines to make a difference. So keep going and you will soon discover that it is possible to sleep well with pain!

## Will your plan pass the REST test?

### Realistic

Be realistic about what is possible so that you give yourself every chance of success. For example, rather than trying to learn three different relaxation techniques at once, just focus on one to start with and practice it for at least two weeks.

### Enjoyable

The more enjoyable your goal is, the more likely you are to succeed. For example, if you decide to stop drinking

caffeinated drinks at night, replace them with drinks you really like.

### Specific

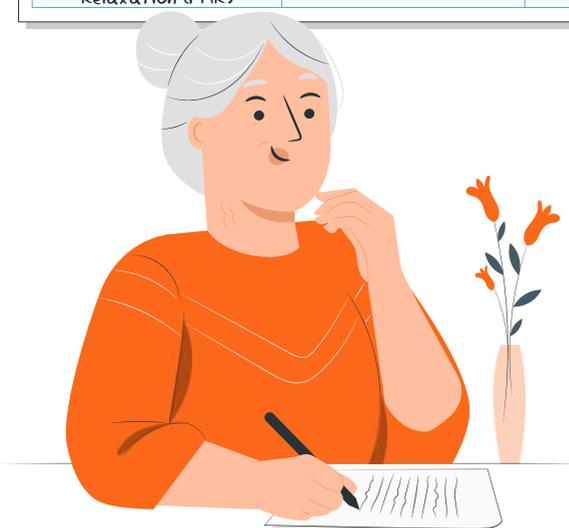
The more detailed your plan is, the more likely it is to happen. So, if you are going to do some physical activities, plan exactly what you are going to do and when.

### Timed

Create routines that are good for your sleep by doing things at a time that's right for you. Give things a try for a few weeks before adding in something new.

## An example of a sleep well plan

My sleep well plan 			
My sleep well goals	What I will do	When I will do it	What help I will need
<b>1 Daily routines</b> Do things that help me to avoid napping	If I feel tired, I'll go for a long run short walk	In the afternoon	Talk to my doctor about the drowsy side effects of my medication
<b>2 Activity levels</b> Do some stretching exercises	Learn and practice five different stretching exercises	Before lunch every day	Find out from Jenny which ones she finds helpful
<b>3 Food and drink choices</b> Eat my evening meal earlier	Eat my evening meal by 6.30pm	Start preparing the meal around 6pm 5pm	Get everyone else on board with this so I don't eat alone
<b>4 Night-time routines</b> Find a more comfortable sleeping position	Experiment with different sleeping positions to discover which work best for me	When I am in bed. (If it doesn't work after a few nights, try something else)	Maybe buy some more pillows or cushions to give me support in bed
<b>5 Helping mind and body to rest</b> Learn how to use Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)	Use PMR at night time when I am in bed	Practice it every night when I go to bed and if I wake up in the night	Ask Terry which Apps helped him to learn relaxation



Turn the page to start creating your own sleep well plan

# My sleep well plan

Remember to make sure your plans pass the 'REST test'  
(see previous page)



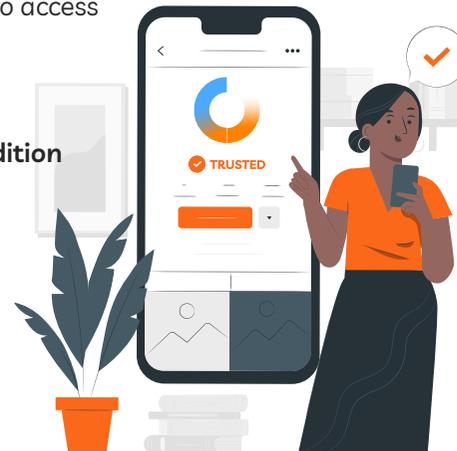
My sleep well goals	What I will do	When I will do it	What help I will need
<b>1 Daily routines</b>			
<b>2 Activity levels</b>			
<b>3 Food and drink choices</b>			
<b>4 Night-time routines</b>			
<b>5 Helping mind and body to rest</b>			



For more tips and ideas about how to self manage your persistent pain why not visit the *Live Well with Pain* website?

*Live Well with Pain* is dedicated to providing easy-to-use self management resources that are used and trusted by many thousands of people living with pain – and the clinicians who support them. Everything is free to access and the site covers topics like:

- understanding pain and the brain
- accepting pain as a long term condition
- setting goals for yourself – and achieving them
- learning how to pace yourself, so you can do more
- relaxation and mindfulness skills
- getting a good night's sleep
- relationships and pain
- pain medicines and their side effects
- planning for setbacks – and overcoming them



Visit [livewellwithpain.co.uk](https://www.livewellwithpain.co.uk)

and start your self management journey today.

