

Are You Sleeping On The Job?

We've all felt our eyelids droop during a particularly boring meeting, or in a warm office. Generally, any change to our sleep, whether that's struggling to get enough sleep or sleeping too much, will result in lowered energy levels. This can amplify feelings of low mood, and also feed into the behaviours changes like not engaging in our usual activities. But why is getting the right amount of sleep such a tricky balance?

Every time we sleep we go through sleep cycles which contain 4 stages. Each sleep cycle takes around 90-120 minutes to complete and to have adequate sleep we will need to run through this entire cycle multiple times and have enough of each stage.



Stage 1 - This is a transition between being awake and being asleep. Our eye movements start to slow down.

Stage 2 - Here our body is slowing down considerably. Our temperature reduces, our digestive system slows, our heart rate drops, our brain activity is slowing and our muscles are starting to relax. This is what we call “Light Sleep” – if someone made a sudden noise we’d instantly wake up and be quite startled.

Stage 3 - Here we're entering into "Deep Sleep" – it would take something loud to wake us up at this point. Our bodies are busy repairing themselves here and making sure we have the energy for the day ahead. This is the most restorative period of sleep and makes us feel like we've had a "good sleep". This stage of sleep is also vital for memory and learning.

Stage 4 - This stage is known as "REM Sleep" – this is where our minds are becoming more active and when we do most of our dreaming. If you've ever seen someone in this stage of sleep, their eyes are moving under their eyelids, and they might be slightly open. REM sleep is important for our psychological health; it is where we process emotions and experiences. Our most vivid dreams occur at this stage. Dreams in non-REM sleep tend to be shorter, focused on a single emotion and less complex.

After each cycle, we may wake temporarily and fall back to sleep usually. As the night progresses, our cycle will change slightly. In general, we have more "Deep Sleep" (stage 3) in the earlier part of the night. As we get closer to morning, we have less "Deep Sleep" and more "REM sleep" (stage 4).

So if you're feeling tired during the day this could be because you struggle to get to sleep to begin with and therefore not get through as many cycles in one night, or you may fully wake between each cycle and struggle to get back to sleep, limiting your cycles throughout the night. You may also be woken up by your alarm whilst you're in deep sleep, so it will feel particularly difficult to wake up and you'll feel extra groggy.

There are loads of ways to improve your chances of a good night's rest, including:

- Reduce caffeine intake overall
- Reduce nicotine intake leading up to bedtime
- Avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime
- Don't go to bed too hungry or too full
- Make sure you feel comfortable in your bed with the right pillows and sheets
- Try to eliminate noise as much possible, or use soothing white noise/ music to help you relax
- Keep your room as dark as possible
- Turn off devices/blue light your screens 2+ hours before bedtime