

Sleep Anxiety in line with World Sleep day

Stress and anxiety can sometimes feel similar – think of your heart beating faster as you get closer to an important work presentation or that nagging feeling that you forgot to put the milk back in the refrigerator. But there's a difference. Stress is the body's natural "fight or flight" response to an external trigger like a deadline or a doctor's appointment.

It is also accompanied by physical sensations – your breathing starts to quicken and certain muscles in your body feel tighter in anticipation of real or perceived harm. It also comes with emotional symptoms, such as a feeling of being overwhelmed, getting agitated, or having difficulty quieting your mind.

This is where anxiety comes in – characterised by persistent and excessive worrying, it is the body's natural response to stress. The link between anxiety and lack of sleep is well established but it can be hard to tell which comes first. Are you sleepless because you are anxious or are you anxious because you lack sleep? It is the ultimate chicken and egg situation.

David Neubauer, MD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, says that the relationship between anxiety and sleep is "bidirectional", meaning that they affect each other, and that it can be difficult to determine which came first. Mild stress and anxiety are manageable. There are many ways to cope, from meditating to simply getting more sleep.

How sleeping better helps you cope with stress and anxiety

New research by scientists at the University of California (UC) Berkeley suggests that deep sleep is a natural remedy for anxiety.

During the study, researchers detected excessive activity in regions of the brain linked to processing emotions. A part of the brain called the medial prefrontal cortex, which is believed to reduce anxiety and stress, also got deactivated after a night of sleeplessness.

As a result, anxiety increased by 30% in sleep-deprived participants.

By contrast, anxiety levels dropped after a night of sufficient sleep, especially in those who remained in the deep, slow-wave, stage of non-REM sleep for longer. The authors of the study are convinced that deep sleep restores the brain's ability to regulate emotions and lower emotional reactivity, which in turn prevents anxiety levels from escalating.

Follow these basic tips for getting a good night's sleep:

- **Keep regular hours** - Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time, all the time, will programme your body to sleep better.
- **Create a restful sleeping environment** - Your bedroom should be kept for rest and sleep. It should be neither too hot, nor too cold, and as quiet and dark as possible.
- **Make sure your bed is comfortable** - It's difficult to get deep, restful sleep on one that's too soft, too hard, too small or too old.
- **Take more exercise (where possible)** - Regular exercise such as walking or home workouts can help relieve the day's stresses and strains. But not too close to bedtime or it may keep you awake!
- **Cut down on stimulants** - such as caffeine in tea or coffee, especially in the evening. They interfere with falling asleep and prevent deep sleep.

- **Don't over-indulge** - Too much food or alcohol, especially late at night just before bedtime, can play havoc with sleep patterns.
- **Avoid smoking** - Yes, it's bad for sleep, too! Smokers take longer to fall asleep, wake more often and often experience more sleep disruption.
- **Try to relax before going to bed** - Have a warm bath, listen to some quiet music or do some yoga to help relax your mind and body.
- **Make jobs lists** - Deal with worries or a heavy workload by making lists of things to be tackled the next day.
- **Switch off devices at least an hour before bed** - Many people are also affected by the blue light emitted from laptops, tablets and smartphones and can be addicted to playing games, scrolling through social media, or watching videos close to bedtime.
- **If you can't sleep** - don't spend more than 20 minutes trying to get to sleep; get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy again – then go back to bed.

If you are experiencing problems sleeping and feel you may need some support, you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

Useful Links for more tips and information:

- www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk
- <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-guidelines-covid-19-isolation>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/>
- <https://troublesleeping.co.uk/>

If you would like to view the Webinar on **Sleep Anxiety in line with World Sleep day** it is being delivered live on **Friday 19th March at 12pm**, please use the following link to register for this session –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6782234535227682317>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.