



Sleep well!

- The importance of sleeping well
- Why a good night's sleep should not be taken for granted
- What we can do to improve sleep

Trauma can lead to sleep disturbances

When somebody has been exposed to acts of war or has experienced other traumatic events and generally has many worries, he or she may develop sleep problems. The body needs time to understand that it is no longer in danger and does not need to be on alert.

As long as war and violence were a part of everyday life, it was perhaps possible to muster up the necessary strength to keep going. The effects can come afterwards – often a long time afterwards – and can be long term. These reactions are unpleasant, but normal.

Sleep problems can manifest themselves in different ways. Some people have difficulty falling asleep, others sleep very lightly or only for short periods. Whatever the disturbance, lack of sleep is a major issue for those who struggle with sleeping.

Why is sleep so important?

Sleep is crucial to our health! Sleeping well and for long enough is essential to functioning properly in our everyday lives.

While we sleep, our body gathers energy to start a new day. Getting enough sleep strengthens our immune system and prevents illnesses.

What happens if we don't get enough sleep?

Adults need an average of 7.5 to 8 hours sleep every day. Some need less, while others need more.

When we don't get enough sleep, we become tired and may not feel at our best. We may have a tendency to fall asleep at school or work. We cannot be as active as usual, and many may find that they become tense, anxious or irritable. Some people withdraw socially, preferring to be left in peace and not talk to anyone.





Good routines for sleeping well

Before going to bed

Have fixed routines for getting up in the morning and for the evening before going to bed. This helps your body to establish a good sleep pattern.

A hot drink without caffeine may help. Avoid caffeinated drinks, such as coffee and cola after 5pm. Try to avoid large meals during the three hours before bedtime.

Loosen stiff muscles and joints, and take a relaxing shower if possible. It can also be helpful to think about something that makes you feel safe and secure, or chat to someone about nice things.

The room where you sleep

When you are trying to sleep, your room should be dark and quiet. You should also make sure that the air is fresh, and that the room is clean and not too hot.

Build up the need to sleep

There are a number of things you can do to increase your need for sleep:

- Exercise daily – a quick walk is good exercise.
- Try not to sleep during the day.
- Try to spend at least half an hour outside during daylight hours.

If you cannot fall asleep

Trying to relax your body can help you get to sleep. Start with your feet and relax different parts of your body, bit by bit. Concentrating on your breathing to relax your mind can also help.

Nightmares

It is common for people who have been in dangerous situations to have nightmares for a long time afterwards. We're not sure why we have nightmares, but difficult situations we have been subjected to often resurface in our nightmares.

Nightmares can come in all phases of sleep and we don't always remember what we dreamt about. The feeling of a nightmare can stay with us when we wake up.

Making our everyday life as safe as possible can often help prevent nightmares. Create a pleasant end to the evening, with quiet activities and positive thoughts.

When waking up after a nightmare, you can try to shake off the negative feelings by doing some of the following:

- Wiggle your toes and stretch your legs.
- Massage your scalp and face.
- Rinse your face and hands in cold water.
- Drink a glass of cold water.
- Open the window and inhale the air.
- Remind yourself that you are in the here and now.
- Train yourself to give the bad dream a happy ending.



The regional resource centres for violence, traumatic stress and suicide prevention (RVTS) engage in skills development through teaching, guidance, consultation and networking. Read more about us at www.rvts.no.

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The Sweet Dreams brochure is aimed at men and women who have experienced war and fled their home country.