

Sleep problems

When sleeping is a problem, the body and mind may still be too alert. Which means it is very hard to be calm and allow relaxation and sleep. The tips below can help. Take a look at which tips suit the situation and yourself. If it concerns a child, if possible, discuss what he or she would like to try out. Try one thing at a time as much as possible and stick with it for at least a week before judging whether something is working or not.

Light

The hormone melatonin regulates sleep-wake processes in the body. Dark stimulates the production of the hormone. Experiencing light, from a TV or another screen, means that less of the hormone is produced. Melatonin makes you sleepy. When you can't go to sleep:

- Make sure you don't watch TV or sit behind a computer screen in the last hour before bedtime;
- wear glasses that block blue light in the last hours before bedtime. Ask your optician for sunglasses that filter blue light, or search Google for computer glasses or gunnar glasses. This is especially important if you spend the last few hours in front of a screen before going to sleep; screens have a large blue light component. Before you buy glasses for a child, you must first know whether the child wants to wear glasses. Children who are sensitive in the face- and head area may find this uncomfortable. Try with cheap (regular or sun-) glasses first;
- don't leave a big light on in the bedroom, but use a small, dim light if you don't want to go to sleep without a light;
- if you go to bed immediately after watching TV, try reading for half an hour before going to sleep; not from a tablet or smartphone, but from a book or an e-reader. Sufficient light to be able to read is important, but make sure that it is not too bright and that the room is otherwise dark. This way you give melatonin a chance to do its job.

Activity

The idea is to give body and mind the chance to relax before getting into bed. If you are having trouble falling asleep, consider the following:

- Avoid active bedtime games that cause too much excitement. Make sure there are at least three hours between exercise and bedtime;
- avoid activities that trigger strong emotions. So reading a book is a good bedtime activity, but not a very exciting or sad book;
- use a regular routine with children. Each parent/caregiver can bring their own aspects into the routine, but keep the same sequence of activities. The brain gets used to the routine and after a while knows that it no longer needs to be alert, because nothing new will happen;
- put a small light, that slowly changes color, next to the bed so that you can look at it while you are in your bed. Because the light changes color very predictably and slowly, the same thing happens as before; the brain knows at a certain point that it no longer has to pay attention, because nothing new is happening. This makes relaxation possible;
- if you are used to showering before going to sleep, it is better to pat dry. Firmly rubbing activates the body;

- it may be better for you not to shower right before going to sleep.

Deep Pressure

Deep pressure is a strategy that can calm the body:

- Use a heavier blanket. For example, a crocheted blanket over the duvet, or put an old-fashioned sleeping bag in the cover instead of a duvet. Older sleeping bags are often heavier;
- tuck the blanket in tightly. If necessary, add extra strips to the duvet, so that it remains tucked in properly;
- take lots of pillows or soft cuddly toys in your bed so that you can completely surround yourself with them. One for your head, one against your stomach, one against your back, a small pillow or cuddly toy to hold... (Which is how I sleep; luckily we have a big bed);
- sleep in a narrow sleeping bag. When you move, you experience resistance and therefore deep pressure.

Sounds

- It can be a safe feeling for children to hear their parents. So maybe keep the bedroom door open, turn on the TV a little louder or don't do the dishes until your child has just gone to bed;
- calm music can also help you fall asleep.

Surroundings

- If you are easily distracted by stuff lying around in the bedroom, store your things in closets so that they do not invite activity;
- feeling safe and cozy can work well for children. You can create a cozier sleeping place by making a tent with, for example, mesh over the bed. Think of how a mosquito net hangs over a bed. It doesn't have to close all the way, of course. Or look for a ready-made bed tent.

If you have any questions, tips or ideas about getting to sleep, you can email us at monique@dutchsensorysolutions.nl.

Kind Regards,
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November 2021