

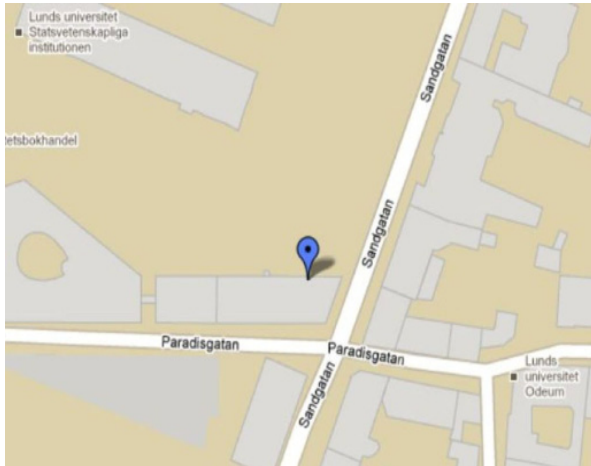
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LUND UNIVERSITY



Student Health Centre

# Advice on how to sleep better

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## WHAT AFFECTS SLEEP?

- Fear of not being able to fall asleep. Worry and stress in daily life can affect sleep. When the worrying thoughts 'take root' they set off an 'alarm reaction' which increases your pulse rate, blood pressure and muscle tension. It usually takes around an hour to regain a sense of calm. If this happens, think about any previous experiences of having a good day despite poor sleep the night before.  
Being a perfectionist on an evening like this and believing that your ability to sleep must function as normal only makes things worse. It is important to make the best of the situation, i.e. when you experience sleep problems, the fear of the effects of sleep deprivation can take over and become the focus of the worry. The underlying problem may be stress and anxiety about everyday problems, but the major obstacle becomes the fear of what will happen if you don't get to sleep.
- Circadian rhythm: if you suffer from insomnia, it is a good idea to try to maintain the same pattern of sleep and waking every day.
- Sleep hygiene: a fairly regular routine before going to bed. Make a distinction between daytime and night time activities in terms of sound and light.
- Diet: no large meals before bed. A mug of warm milk with honey may help. Coffee, Coca Cola and tea contain substances that keep you awake. Caffeine has a half-life of 3–7 hours. Alcohol may make it easier to fall asleep, but when the effect wears off your pulse rate and blood pressure are activated; making you sleep unwell.
- Exercise can improve sleep, but you should not exercise later than 2–3 hours before going to bed.

- One third of the population have difficulty sleeping at some time during the year.
- Sleep is made up of 60–90 minute cycles which include all the different stages of sleep. At the start of the night deep sleep dominates and towards morning dream sleep dominates. At the end of each cycle we come close to waking and it is therefore easy to wake up during the night if our minds are occupied with a lot of thoughts and feelings. We only remember waking up if we are awake for at least four minutes.
- The times at which we sleep are controlled by our circadian rhythm, or body clock. It takes time to change this rhythm – around 15–30 minutes every third night.

## ADVICE FOR BETTER SLEEP

- Mind: what is it that is keeping you awake? Around one and a half hours before you go to bed, take a large sheet of paper and write down the thoughts and worries that come to mind. Identify worrying thoughts and see if it is possible to reformulate them as reasonable and calm thoughts so that you can let go of the problems for the night. Try to allow yourself to leave the problems on paper overnight. 'Clear out' your thoughts before bed. Tomorrow is a new day!
- Feelings: fill yourself with a pleasant feeling; you might have a 'good' emotional memory which you can focus on, which will make you relax easier.
- Distraction: with your mind, body and feelings in balance, it is nice to occupy your thoughts and feelings with a relaxing activity such as reading a light-hearted book, newspaper or magazine or listening to music in order to maintain the good balance.
- "Night vigil": get out of bed if sleep does not come to you. It is better to break negative thought patterns with a different activity for a while. In general it takes between one hour and one and a half hours before you can fall asleep again.
- Sleeping tablets: if you need to use sleeping tablets, take them for short periods (2–3 nights) in order to establish better sleep patterns and release 'sleep hormones'. Sleeping tablets reduce the amount of deep sleep and dream sleep we have, but are a good substitute if you are not able to fall into natural sleep. Long periods of insomnia affect our tolerance of everyday problems and wear down our resources.

## RELAXATION EXERCISE

This exercise is a good one to do in bed when it is time to go to sleep. 1. Relax your jaw and larynx. Close your eyes and take a deep breath: breathe in, breathe in, hold your breath, feel the tension and breathe out. 2. Open your eyelids halfway and then let them fall closed again. Repeat steps 1 and 2 for a while and then continue breathing at your own rate. You can also reinforce the exhaling effect by counting down from 400 each time you breathe out until you can't count any further.

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