

SLEEP S.O.S.

'Coronasomnia' is on the rise, as one third of us are sleeping less than the recommended six hours at night. We investigate how to get a good night's rest



We are a nation in need of a good night's kip: Google searches for "how to sleep better at night" have rocketed 129% over the past year and, pandemic aside, one third of UK adults are estimated to suffer from insomnia – and it affects women more than men.

For most of us, six to eight hours of slumber are needed, says the NHS. Without it, mental health problems can mount and we are less able to combat viruses such as the common cold.

"Our brain and body work hard during the night, performing important tasks that recuperate and restore our physical and mental functioning, and producing cells that respond to viral threats," says Dr Neil Stanley, former chairman of the British Sleep Society. With rising numbers of us yearning for a good night's rest, how can we tackle sleeplessness?

THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Whether you're finding it hard to drop off or waking up every hour, Kathryn Pinkham from The Insomnia Clinic (theinsomniaclinic.co.uk) advises not to spend too long in bed, and make lists of your thoughts and worries. "Go to bed later and get up earlier; this will encourage your body's natural sleep drive to kick in. You will crave more sleep, fall asleep faster and find the quality will improve," she says.

There's one obvious cause of insomnia. "Stress causes sleeplessness due to increased levels of cortisol," says sleep expert and psychologist Dr Lindsay Browning. "Exercise helps us have more deep sleep, but avoid any exercise within a couple of hours of bedtime."

So keep your vigorous HIIT sessions for the morning. Workouts during the day matter too as "we need sunlight to help our bodies know the difference between night and day, so make sure you get outside for a walk daily".

Clock-watching is a no-no as it "encourages you to start calculations of how long you have been awake; the pressure will keep your mind active and stop sleep", says Lindsay.

Bedrooms have been used by many of us more during lockdown – as offices, gyms and somewhere to relax. Winding down is important, so clear your bedroom of the day's stresses and make sure your surroundings are at the optimal temperature of 16-18 degrees for sleep.

Helping to regulate the sleep hormone melatonin, magnesium allows the body and mind to relax. Consider a bath oil or salts packed with this magic mineral, to help you drift off.

While falling asleep to your latest Netflix series binge may seem appealing, keep light out. When it's dark, your body releases melatonin, which helps you to relax, so opt for a sleep mask or blackout curtains for that perfect good night's zzzz...

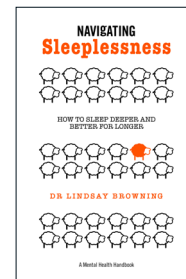
Sleep Sidekicks



Morphée, £79.95. Visit morphee.co. No blue light here – disconnect from the day with this audio sleeping aid, which holds more than 200 meditation combinations for inner calm



Comfort is key – the Mirapocket spring system on **Silentnight's Eco Comfort Breathe Pocket 2000 mattress** (from £489; visit silentnight.co.uk) distributes your weight evenly for perfect slumber



Navigating Sleeplessness: A Mental Health Handbook, by Dr Lindsay Browning, £8.99. From whsmith.co.uk. This bedside-table must-have is packed with chapters to help you unlearn bad sleep habits



Mela Weighted Blanket, from £109.99. Visit melacomfort.co.uk. Mind racing? Legs feeling restless? Evenly spreading weight and pressure across your body, this blanket will calm your nervous system for quality sleep

BetterYou Magnesium Sleep Bath Flakes, £9.95.

Visit betteryou.com. For the ultimate relaxation, add at least two cups to your evening bath and allow the mineral to lull you into stress-free sleep