

TO YOU WHO  
**HAVE SLEEP PROBLEMS**



# To you who have sleep problems

**Many refugees have sleep problems. This bothers some people every night, others now and then. Such problems can manifest themselves as difficulties falling asleep, constantly interrupted sleep, waking early or repeated nightmares.**

Sleep problems often relate to the life situation in which one finds oneself, what one is thinking about or experiences that one has had.

Previous difficult experiences can come back in the form of nightmares, night after night.

Other problems in life can also affect sleep, and poor sleep can lead to many things feeling heavy and difficult during the day. Contact your doctor if you have difficulties sleeping over time.

Your doctor can find out if these difficulties are due to sickness, or if they relate to your situation in life. In this brochure, you will find good advice on what you can do to improve your sleep, regardless of the reason why you sleep poorly.



# Advice for better sleep

## Importance of a regular daily schedule

Many things about life as a refugee can cause one's daily schedule to become irregular. People living at an asylum-processing centre find that many are awake during the night. This makes it easier to do the same thing. If one has nothing to do during the day, it is easier to sleep during daytime, which in turn leads to one being awake in the evening and at night. Try to reverse your daily schedule, so that it is more like the schedule you had when you were able to sleep. This can mean getting up early, even if you have nothing in particular to do, and going to bed at a more normal time. Your body needs time to adjust to new routines, so it can take time before your sleep improves.

## Do the same thing every night before going to bed

Your body needs routines. In time, a regular schedule will help you sleep better.

## Use your body actively during the day

Physical activity often helps improve sleep. As little as 15 minutes of exercise a day can help one's body more easily relax when it is time to sleep. For example, one can take a walk before going to bed. However, one should allow for at least 30 minutes between exercise/physical activity and bedtime. This gives the body time to relax.



## **Get up if you do not fall asleep within 30 minutes**

Avoid making an effort to fall asleep – the more of an effort you make, the harder it can be to fall asleep. If you are unable to fall asleep within 30 minutes, get up. Go to another room and sit still, or engage in a calm activity, until you feel tired again. If you are then unable to fall asleep within 30 minutes, get up again. Do this as many times as you must until you are able to fall asleep.

## **Imagine a peaceful place**

Lie down with your eyes closed and imagine that you are in your favourite place, a place that is calm and peaceful. It can be a place in your hometown, in your family's house or on a sunny beach. Wherever it is, imagine that you are there. Think about your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the flowers, feel the warmth from the sun, or sensations relating to the place you choose. Just relax and enjoy it, and fall asleep. Once you have found a peaceful and effective place, you will find that the more often you use it to fall asleep, the easier it will become.



## Avoid caffeine

Caffeine is a substance that makes the body more restless and awake. There is caffeine in coffee, black tea (but not in herbal tea), chocolate and coca cola. If you sleep poorly, it is wise to avoid caffeine, especially in the evening and at night.

## Nightmares

Nightmares often closely relate to things we have experienced, or to pressure we feel in a given situation in life. Many find that nightmares decrease if they talk about the nightmares with someone they trust.

One can also work through a nightmare by thinking about the nightmare anew, and then creating a more positive continuation of the story in the nightmare. One can also write down the nightmare, but with a more positive ending.



## **If nothing helps**

Sometimes one tries almost everything, but without the sleep problems getting any better. Talk to your doctor. Maybe you need a referral to a specialist for a more detailed examination and review of your sleep problems. For refugees, there can be comfort in knowing that sleep problems most often directly relate to one's situation in life. When their situation in life changes, most find that their sleep pattern also improves.

## **Children also have sleep problems**

For children, sleep problems often relate to their overall situation in life. Like adults, children can have sleep problems after traumatic and stressful experiences. These can also be a reaction to problems within the family, including problems between the parents.

If your child has sleep problems, talk to your child about what he/she thinks about, or dreams about. Offer closeness, comfort and support. Create regular evening routines for your child. Read a fairy tale, or sing a song.

Contact your local public health nurse, or your regular doctor, if your child's sleep problems continue.

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