

# Improving your sleep

Paediatric Specialist Fatigue Service

Patient Information

## Why is Sleep Important?

- It helps the brain and body to work at their best
- It helps optimise and balance physical health, brain function, emotions and relationships
- It will give you the best chance of getting better



Problems with sleep are very common in chronic fatigue.

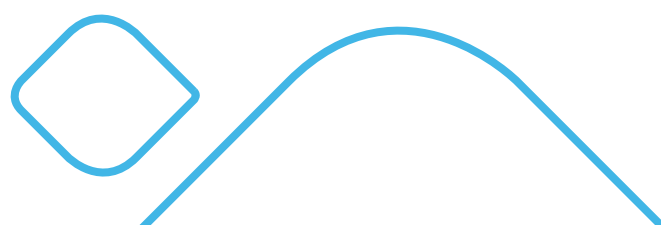
There are two things to tackle:

- Making sure you have the right amount of sleep
- Getting your body clock into a good sleep routine

## How much should I Sleep?

This varies for each person. Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) recommend the below times:

Age	Recommended sleep time in 24hrs
Children 3 - 5 years	10 - 13 hours including naps
Children 6 – 12 years	9 - 12 hours
Teenagers 13 – 18 years	8 - 10 hours



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**Too much sleep** (even just 1 hour more than you need) can reduce the quality of your sleep and leave you feeling more tired.

When you have fatigue it might feel like you need to sleep more, but this can in fact make symptoms worse.



**We advise sticking as closely as you can to the recommended sleep duration for your age group.**

- At first this might make you feel worse because it might mean having less sleep, but after a couple of weeks you should be getting better **quality** sleep at night and most young people start to feel better.
- Aim to go to bed and wake up at the **same time every day**, including weekends and holidays.
- The most important thing to set is your **wake-up time**, which should be anchored to the same time every day.



## When should I sleep?

Our **Circadian Rhythm** is our wake/sleep cycle. This usually means you will be awake in the day and asleep during the night. However, day/night reversal can be common in young people with chronic fatigue. If you suffer from this, try to treat it like jet lag:

- Gradually bring forward your wake-up time.
- Try waking **30 to 60 minutes** earlier each day or few days until you're waking up at your required time.

**It is important that your brain is given the right stimulation to tell it if it is day or night.**

To help this, we recommend

- Opening your curtains/blinds as soon as you wake up.
- Try to spend some time outside in natural day light during the day (**at least 30 minutes**).
- In the evenings, use a dim light or lamp instead of bright lights and consider coming off screens (which give off blue light, similar to daylight) in the **hour** before you want to go to sleep.

## Can I rest during the day?

There are different types of rest which people find helpful. **Rest** doesn't have to involve sleeping and can include sitting quietly or zoning out whilst listening to restful music or a relaxation app.

If possible, stay out of bed during the day to avoid falling asleep and to boost a better distinction between day and night.



If you really need a nap, make sure it is **less than 30 minutes, before 3pm** and in a light room, that ideally is **not your bedroom**, with the **curtains open**. This is to stop you going into deep sleep, which could disrupt your night sleep.

## Sleep routine/ wind-down

We recommend **relaxing and winding down** before bed, to prepare your body and brain for sleep. This should consist of activities which relax your brain and give it signals that it is time to go to sleep. Don't think too much about sleep, just focus on relaxing!

Things that can help:

- Listening to gentle relaxing music
- Relaxation – mentally and physically winding down are both important. Relaxation strategies such as mindfulness and breathing exercises can be very helpful
- Apps can be a helpful guide for relaxation/ mindfulness techniques, for example Mindshift and Pzizz.
- Deal with thoughts and worries earlier in the day or try journaling or writing things down as this can be a helpful way of letting go of these thoughts.
- Avoid anything containing caffeine from the afternoon onwards – caffeine is a stimulant and is found in coffee, tea, energy drinks, carbonated drinks, and chocolate. This stays in your system for some time.
- Don't do things just before bed that might stimulate your brain or body, such as watching stimulating TV, homework, computer games, certain books (e.g. scary ones), social media or energetic physical activity .



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## What if I can't get to sleep?

We advise you avoid lying in bed tossing and turning.  
Try using relaxation techniques to help you relax so you can go to sleep.

If you are feeling frustrated and haven't fallen asleep within approximately **20 minutes** (but remember, don't watch the clock!) then we advise you get up, go out of the bedroom and perhaps get yourself a drink or sit somewhere quietly in dim light. You could also try the relaxation techniques again. Avoid anything stimulating.

You may need to repeat this a few times but in time you should find yourself getting off to sleep easier.

## Further Information

Paediatric Specialist Fatigue Service - [www.ruh.nhs.uk/cfs](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/cfs)

Please see our Relaxation leaflet on our website for further advice on relaxation exercises

Sleep times are taken from The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM), who produced a 'Consensus Statement' in 2016 regarding recommended amount of sleep for children and young people.

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