



Hello again,

Having previously thought about low mood and anxiety it seemed sensible to spend some time considering the whole issue of **sleep**, and its' importance given that poor sleep is a common factor in those of us who experience low mood or anxiety. Ironically of course, these difficulties can lead to trouble sleeping, but a lack of sleep also contributes to these difficulties worsening, so it is often a tricky cycle to break free of.

Within this, I am conscious of the change in our clocks during April and the subsequent lighter evenings which for many of us can induce a mood improvement. Over the years many have commented to me about how 'going to work in the dark and coming home in the dark' contributes to low mood, and I have often reflected how this is elevated by a poor sleep pattern, when the frustration of these 'dark experiences' can so easily cloud just about everything else. I am also very conscious of those of us with children who are sitting exams now, and the impact this form of stress can have upon sleep.



I therefore hope this is useful for you, and the strategies welcomed as we move into (hopefully) longer spells of better weather.

Next month we have one of the freelance therapists, Lynn Brown, writing for us, and I am sure you will join me in welcoming her work.

Until then, my very warmest wishes as always, **Rebekah Gold Jones, MBACP, MNCS (accred), St AFT. Psychotherapist and Officer for Pastoral Care and Counselling.**

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Sleep is as important to our health as eating, drinking and breathing. It allows our bodies to repair themselves and our brains to consolidate our memories and process information.” (Mental Health Foundation, 2018)

We all are familiar with the impact having a bad night’s sleep can have upon us the next day, when we are far from our best and are perhaps reaching for the caffeine or sugar.

Often we become more irritable, find it harder to concentrate, or simply don’t work or engage to the same standard we might usually expect to, and the longer our sleep is disrupted the worse these symptoms become. For our employers, these difficulties can have a real impact upon the workplace – even causing more accidents – and for our relationships the difficulties can cause a ripple effect of issues.



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Thankfully we are all becoming more aware of the impact of sleep deprivation or disruption on our health and wellbeing, and the implications it has upon all aspects of our lives. Reports and studies are being carried out which consistently

highlight the importance of taking this area seriously, whatever your position in life. This is not just due to the economic effect of tired employees, but also in recognition of the growing evidence that poor sleep is linked to physical problems

such as a weakened immune system, loss of cognitive skills (such as speech, memory and innovative or flexible thinking) and mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression. Sleep enables processing time, whether or not we are aware of dream activity, and for the body to restock and repair and recharge – all essential activities to keep us physically and mentally healthy.

Of course, there are many reasons why we are kept awake at night, from stress at work or worries at home, to becoming a new parent or experiencing physical pain. This means that it is really important for us all to acknowledge that there could be a wide range of reasons for the sleep disturbance, and, therefore, a wide range of actions required to reset the 'sleep clock'.

What might help: There are a variety of different ways we can aid our sleep to return to our usual patterns including:

- Improve sleep hygiene: adjust the light, noise and temperature in the bedroom to ensure the room is a place just for rest. Sleep specialists recommend no TV's or 'screens' in the bedroom, or for an hour before sleep.
- Stop eating and drinking times later in the evening: caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and sugar are all known to disturb sleep – even if you can get to sleep easier after a glass of wine, the likelihood is that your sleep will be impaired during the second half of the night, even just because alcohol is a diuretic! It is important not to try and sleep on a hungry stomach, but eating the 'right'

- Foods, for example a glass of warm milk and an oat based biscuit, can help with natural melatonin levels in the body, which helps you sleep.
- Alter exercise times: exercise is a great way to tire the body and enable better sleep, however not later in the day! Exercise induces adrenaline production, which can make sleep more difficult especially for those who are prone to sleep disturbance.
- Learn to relax: listen to an audio book, relaxing music, learn relaxation techniques which focus upon breathing and releasing physical tension.... All of these activities will be helpful at those times of increased stress, but also at times where sleep feels impossible. Becoming more in control of our sleep by having techniques to use can remove the tendency to 'fight' disturbed sleep, which of course only serves to increase the levels of stress and worry and subsequently exacerbate the sleep issue.

Helpful websites: There are some excellent online sites regarding sleep disturbance and sleep hygiene:

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/SleepProblems.asp

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/#.WvI5FOr6vIU

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/sleep-disorders-and-problems.htm