

The Race To Sleep

Activity Guidelines

Background

There are all kinds of lifestyle factors that can lead to a poor night's sleep. Poor sleep can be bad for your health, leading to a lack of concentration and an inability to carry out simple tasks during the day. Stress and over-thinking (because of work, deadlines, exams etc.), excitement before bedtime from social media, gaming and exercise can cause a lack of good sleep. There are practical issues too, such as whether your bedroom temperature is ideal, or whether your curtains keep the light out. Blue light emitted from smartphones, tablets and gaming devices can cause the brain to delay and potentially affect the release of melatonin, the "sleep-promoting hormone"...which is why it's best to keep all electronic devices out of the bedroom, and definitely not use them before trying to get to sleep.

This activity helps highlight the lifestyle behaviours required to have a good night's sleep and maintain healthy wellbeing.

What you will need:

- Download and print out the board game 'The Race To Sleep' sheet (A3 in size) from The Physiological Society's website.
- Download the 'Counters and Behaviour Cards' sheets (A4 in size) from The Physiological Society's website. (You could use regular board game counters if wished).
- A small bag (or a bowl or envelope) for participants to pick out the behaviour cards from.

- A small prize for the winner e.g. sticker, key ring.

How to run the activity:

Print all of the downloaded sheets onto thin card or paper, and cut out the counters and behaviour cards. For the behaviour cards, make sure to cut along the dotted lines and fold along the bold lines. Place all of the behaviour cards into a bag. (Note: If you're running this activity with young children or families, you may want to leave out some of the cards e.g. drinking alcohol and smoking behaviours).

Ask all participants to choose a counter and place it on the middle step of the board (number '5') telling them that they have all decided to go to bed/sleep, so they are already headed in the right direction. The aim is to find out who gets to the ASLEEP 'Pillow' section first (and not back to the 'AWAKE' position), based on their behaviours during the day and before going to sleep.

Each participant then takes it in turns to pick a behaviour card out of the bag. Ask them to read out their behaviour and what action needs to be taken i.e. is their behaviour causing them to move towards ASLEEP, or further away?

Discuss the behaviours that promote sleep and those that inhibit sleep and why. Each behaviour card has details about this.

Adaptations:

This game could also be played outdoors with participants being the counters and either moving forwards or backwards along an 'Awake-Asleep' line marked on the ground.

Behaviour card information and explanations:

Your take a call on your mobile at midnight – go back 1 step

You need to spend some time winding down before bed, an hour is ideal to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep. Blue light from the screen of your phone disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin.

You have a walk in the park at lunchtime – go forward 3 steps

Keeping active during the day tires out your body making it ready for a good night's sleep so that it can recover for the next day. It's also important to get as much natural light during the day as you can.

You have an energy drink whilst studying after dinner – go back 2 steps

Energy drinks contain caffeine which is a stimulant that disrupts the production of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and makes us feel more alert by promoting the production of a hormone called adrenaline. It should be avoided in the evening as it disrupts your sleep cycle making it more difficult to get to sleep.

You're stressed because you forgot to do your homework – go back 1 step

You need to spend some time winding down before bed, an hour is ideal to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep. If you are stressed your muscles may be tense and your heart may be racing which can prevent you from falling asleep.

You pack all your electronics away an hour before bed and listen to relaxing music instead – go forward 3 steps

Electronic devices emit blue light which disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin. You need to spend some time winding down in the evening to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep.

You get ready for bed in the bathroom with bright background

lighting – go back 1 step

Artificial light disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, therefore it is best to sleep in the dark.

You are online gaming until late – go back 2 steps

Electronic devices emit blue light which disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin. You need to spend some time winding down in the evening to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep. The content of some games can be alerting and stimulating, making it harder to get to sleep.

You go for a swim after school – go forward 3 steps

Keeping active during the day tires out your body making it ready for a good night's sleep so that it can recover for the next day.

You walk to school in the morning – go forward 3 steps

Keeping active during the day tires out your body making it ready for a good night's sleep so that it can recover for the next day. It's also important to get as much natural light during the day as you can.

You fall asleep on the bus home from school – go back 1 step

This suggests you are not getting enough 'good quality sleep'. It is best not to nap during the day as this can confuse your body and disrupt its sleep cycle making it harder to sleep at night.

Your bedroom is quiet and dark, with good curtains/blinds – go forward 3 steps

Artificial light disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, therefore it is best to sleep in the dark.

You have a TV, computer or games console in your bedroom – go back 1 step

Electronic devices emit blue light which disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin. Content of TV

programmes, films and games can be alerting and stimulating, making it harder to get to sleep.

You lie down to rest and nod off for an hour- go back 1 step

It is best not to nap during the day as this can confuse your body and disrupt its sleep cycle making it harder to sleep at night.

Your bedroom is just the right temperature (18-21 degrees C) - go forward 3 steps

When you go to sleep your body temperature decreases. Your room needs to be at a suitable temperature for your body to achieve this set point in temperature which then induces sleep.

Your bedroom is too hot (25 degrees C) - go back 1 step

When you go to sleep your body temperature decreases. Your room needs to be at a suitable temperature for your body to achieve this set point in temperature which then induces sleep. If you're too hot you are likely to wake up.

Your bedroom is too cold (15 degrees C) - go back 1 step

When you go to sleep your body temperature decreases. Your room needs to be at a suitable temperature for your body to achieve this set point in temperature which then induces sleep. If you're too cold you are likely to wake up.

You go to bed at the same time every night - go forward 3 steps

Having a daily routine where you go to bed and get up at the same time can help strengthen your body clock (circadian rhythm) so that you get a better night's sleep.

You go to bed before you are sleepy - go back 1 step

Going to bed before you are sleepy means you have not built up enough sleep pressure during the day and your body is not ready to sleep. This can lead to insomnia. You need to spend some time winding down before bed, an hour is ideal to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep.

You turn off your TV, computer games and loud music at least an hour before bedtime - go forward 3 steps

Electronic devices emit blue light which disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops

producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin. You need to spend some time winding down in the evening to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep. Content of TV programmes, films and games can be alerting and stimulating, making it harder to get to sleep.

You have a warm, relaxing bath before bed - go forward 3 steps

You need to spend some time winding down before bed, an hour is ideal to relax your body ready for a good night's sleep.

You have a cup of coffee before bed - go back 2 steps

Coffee contains caffeine which is a stimulant that disrupts the production of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and makes us feel more alert by promoting the production of a hormone called adrenaline. It should be avoided in the evening as it disrupts your sleep cycle making it more difficult to get to sleep.

You drink a cup of tea before bed - go back 2 steps

Some types of tea contain caffeine which is a stimulant that disrupts the production of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and makes us feel more alert by promoting the production of a hormone called adrenaline. It should be avoided in the evening as it disrupts your sleep cycle making it more difficult to get to sleep.

You don't drink any fizzy drinks before bedtime - go forward 3 steps

Some fizzy drinks contain caffeine which is a stimulant that disrupts the production of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and makes us feel more alert by promoting the production of a hormone called adrenaline. It should be avoided in the evening as it disrupts your sleep cycle making it more difficult to get to sleep.

You drink wine every evening - go back 2 steps

Drinking alcohol helps you to fall asleep quicker but makes your sleep more broken, resulting in less deep sleep during the night and therefore you wake up feeling groggy. Alcohol can also promote snoring and breathing pauses during sleep.

You smoked a cigarette in the evening - go back 1 step

Cigarettes contain nicotine which is a stimulant that disrupts the production of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and makes us

feel more alert, therefore it is best to avoid it to have a good sleep. Smoking can also promote snoring and breathing pauses during sleep.

You had a heavy meal before bedtime – go back 2 steps

You should give your body enough time to digest your dinner before you go to sleep e.g. 2 hours. If you eat just before going to sleep you may feel uncomfortable and bloated and therefore may find it difficult to wind down.

You had a piece of toast before bedtime, because you were hungry - go forward 3 steps

You shouldn't be hungry before you go to sleep however, it is important that you do not eat a large meal close to bedtime as this can make you uncomfortable and bloated as your body has not had time to digest the food.

You make sure you don't exercise too close to bedtime – go forward 3 steps

Keeping active during the day tires out your body making it ready for a good night's sleep, however you need to spend some time winding down in the evening to relax your body before going to bed. Exercise too close to bedtime increases cortisol levels, which makes it harder to get to sleep.

You wake up the same time every morning – go forward 3 steps

Having a daily routine where you go to bed and get up at the same time can help strengthen your body clock (circadian rhythm) so that you get a better night's sleep.

You have a different time to wake up every day – go back 1 step

Having a daily routine where you go to bed and get up at the same time can help strengthen your body clock (circadian rhythm) so that you get a better night's sleep.

You take lots of naps during the day to make up for constant bad nights sleep – go back 1 step

It is best not to nap lots during the day as this can confuse your body and disrupt its sleep cycle making it harder to sleep at night.

You felt a little sleepy during the day, so you took a quick power nap

of 15 minutes – go forward 3 steps

15 minute naps can be good for improving your alertness in the short term but it is important not to nap too close to your bedtime as this can make it more difficult for you to fall asleep.

You answered some ‘important’ emails on your smartphone while lying in bed – go back 2 steps

Electronic devices emit blue light which disrupts your sleep cycle by tricking your body into thinking that it is day time so it stops producing the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin. You need to spend some time winding down in the evening to relax your body ready for a good night’s sleep.