



**Being Well
Together**



**Why sleep is such an important
workplace wellbeing topic**
Employee Guide

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Introduction

This guide on the importance of sleep and good sleep hygiene, is intended for employees of Being Well Together Supporters. It forms part of a broader set of definitive guides on everything from mental health through to nutrition.

The guide has been put together in partnership with mental health specialists Think Talk Together from Mates in Mind. It will help you navigate through the steps you need to take, to achieve the best health and wellbeing outcome for you, the employee. No matter what your position or location, the guide will enable you to assess your current situation, understand any gaps and explore the most effective measures for you.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to the Being Well Together liaison person within your organisation or your HR team, to find out what other support is available.

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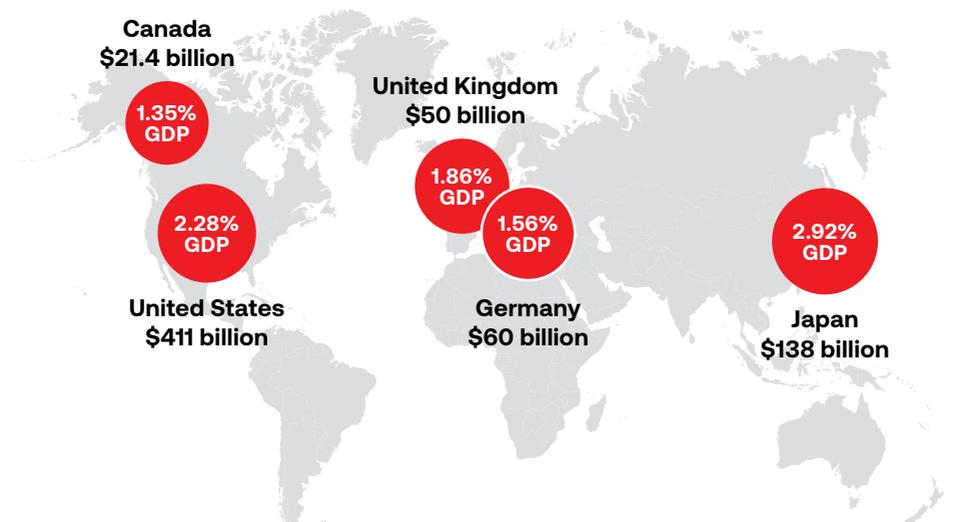
Why is good sleep and recovery a workplace wellbeing issue?

The development of the 'always on' digital economy has revolutionised the way that we work. This evolution has resulted in many positives: access to information, instant communication channels so that we are more connected globally, access from anywhere where we connect to the internet, and created wealth and jobs. However, there is a downside to this, and it often means that work-life boundaries become blurred and are affecting our lives; both at work and at home, and impacting our quality of sleep.

Many reports suggest that up to a third of UK adults are affected by insomnia, either the inability to drift off, or from disrupted sleep that is cut short of the 7-9 hours we need for our bodies to

repair and rest effectively. (www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/the-value-of-the-sleep-economy.html) If this is an occasional incident it is manageable, but if it is the result of persistent sleep deprivation it can have a significant effect on every aspect of someone's life. In fact, many people cite good sleep as the biggest single contributor to living better quality lives.

Lack of sleep, or disturbed sleep, has a direct impact on both the physical and mental health of individuals and is essential for optimum functioning, wellbeing and performance. It's where we do our 'housekeeping' and process waste and toxins from our brains, file information, and allows for the repair and renewal of our immune system, organs, muscles and bones. (www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness)



Map showing economic costs of insufficient sleep across five OECD countries. Source: Rand Europe

The impact of poor sleep on wellbeing and health

Mental health:

- Affects speech, memory and cognitive decision making
- Can make people irritable and argumentative
- Decreases innovation and creativity
- Increased risk of developing anxiety and depression
- Greater risk-taking behaviours.

Physical health:

- Up to a third higher mortality risk
- Greater risk of injury and accidents
- More likely to have health conditions such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes
- Increased uptake of unhealthy lifestyle habits: alcohol consumption, smoking and high sugar foods, for example.

Employers are becoming increasingly aware that sleep deprivation is impacting on performance, safety and attributed to lower productivity and increased absence from work. Whilst a number of the causes of poor sleep might come from outside of work, the effects can be felt in the workplace, as can the impact on performance and quality of service. A report on sleep by RAND Europe suggests that tired employees could be costing the UK economy about £30 billion per annum.

What the law says on this issue

Consultation

As highlighted in one of our accompanying guides (Worker consultation and involvement to improve safety) employers have a legal duty to consult with their employees on all matters regarding their health, safety and welfare. This can be achieved face-to-face, or via employee representatives depending on what employers have in place.

Managing risk

Employers also have a duty to minimise and manage risks associated with fatigue, shift work and sleep deprivation. This includes adhering to the Working Time Regulations 1998 (WTR) and considering the risk factors associated with excessive work, overtime and changing shift patterns. If it is a high-risk industry such as aviation, transportation, or construction, there are even tighter regulations.



What affects sleep?

Work related:

Shift work – particularly irregular shift patterns which can disrupt the body’s natural rhythm, affecting both mental and physical health. Consider how to minimise the risk of shift work to reduce incidences of accidents, mistakes and improve wellbeing. Try to get enough rest and ensure that you are exercising and eating healthily too.

Globalisation – working across international time zones either in person or digitally can mean that employee body clocks are affected, and sleep impacted. Air travel and jet lag can be very debilitating, so ensure that you take these factors into consideration and make reasonable adjustments as appropriate.

Longer working weeks – linked to globalisation and digital advances, employees are finding it harder to disconnect from work and get a good work-life balance. Access to our digital devices, smartphones and laptops makes it all too easy to keep working when we should be resting. Learn to switch devices off and manage workload so that you can have some downtime, relaxing with family and friends, or you have time to do a hobby or exercise.

Work-related stress and relationships with colleagues – we all live with a level of stress or pressure, both at work and at home, but when it tips over into a chronic issue it can have a severe impact on sleep quality. All employers have a legal responsibility to minimise work related stress or injury for their employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Similarly bullying and harassment at work, or a difficult relationship with a line manager, can cause work-related stress and insomnia. Create a culture whereby people treat each other with respect and where good behaviours are encouraged. Seek help early and speak to a colleague or line manager if you are experiencing stress or are unhappy at work.

Personal factors

Illness and disability – whether it’s a short-term illness, or a more life changing illness/disability – this diagnosis, and any side effects of medication or treatment, can cause disruption to sleep. There are even some specific conditions that affect sleep such as sleep apnoea. Consider what workplace adjustments you may need to support you to manage your condition effectively and remain in work. Talk to your line manager or HR about them.

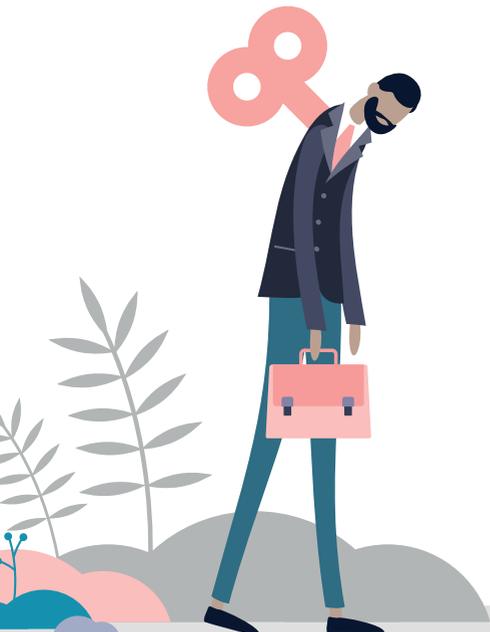
Mental health conditions – living with a pre-existing mental health condition can significantly affect sleep quality. Mental health charities such as Mates in Mind www.matesinmind.org and the NHS www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression, provide great advice for both employers and individuals.

Bereavement – losing someone close can cause mental health problems and sleep deprivation. This is common and can result in fatigue, mood swings and depression. Managing someone who has been bereaved can affect the line manager’s sleep quality too. Make sure you talk about it and seek out appropriate support and any specialist services if necessary.

Financial concerns – money problems have become a major reason for poor sleep quality and lack of sleep. Financial pressures can cause anxiety, panic attacks and depression across all generations of employees, therefore getting financial advice and education can support you to manage your money at every stage of life.

Age – as people age, they are less able to get adequate levels of sleep all in one session, and their health may affect sleep too. Age specific conditions such as menopause can disrupt sleep for a number of years for example. Try to get regular rest breaks and recharge fully.

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Financial pressures can cause anxiety, panic attacks and depression



Creating the right environment for a good night's sleep

- ✓ Get into a routine – set fixed times for going to bed and waking up
- ✓ Turn off your devices in the bedroom, preferably one hour before you plan on going to sleep
- ✓ Avoid watching TV, working or eating a large meal before going to bed
- ✓ Maintain an environment that promotes good sleep – not too hot, cold, noisy or light
- ✓ Take regular exercise – preferably in the fresh air
- ✓ Create a relaxing routine before bed – read, have a cool bath and cut down on alcohol and caffeine in the evenings
- ✓ Some people find it helpful to have a pen and pad beside the bed so that they can jot down ideas or worries if they are keeping them awake

Recommended reading

Mental Health Foundation – How to sleep better

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/file/1485/download?token=BUCq_Am1

The Sleep Council

<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk>

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep

