



EFL “Brieflet”: Engaging with Sleep Hygiene

Sleep deprivation is an illegal torture ... outlawed by the Geneva Convention ... but most of us do it to ourselves. R. Hurd

Sleep Hygiene is the application of science and knowledge to the maintenance of good quality sleep. It involves understanding the 24-hour cycle (circadian rhythm) of our bodies and responding in a way that maintains good health. Whilst there are differences, we all need sleep to repair the daily demands upon our physical and mental health. You might be able to stay awake for up to 16 hours - or even 18 hours on occasion. But do this too often and some of your actions and decision-making will appear little different from someone under the influence of alcohol. Not great when you're trying to be an effective partner, parent, employer/employee - human being!

People who say they sleep like a baby usually don't have one. L. J. Burke

Sleep Debt and Signs of Poor Sleep

Planned or not, people often stay awake for longer hours than is optimal for them. Reasons might include: parenting; shifts or project deadlines at work; travelling across time zones; partying; toxic substance use. In any event, each hour taken from your personal sleep requirements creates *Sleep Debt* and needs to be paid back. Crucial to maintaining good *Sleep Hygiene*, the elimination of *Sleep Debt* takes active commitment and discipline. First, you need to assess possible *Signs of Poor Sleep*:

- Not able to sleep; or can't get back to sleep
- Snoring; fitful sleep; repeated waking
- Always needing an alarm clock to wake up at the usual time
- Waking up tired
- During the day: poor decision-making and memory; lethargy; irritability; emotional flatness; low motivation; clumsiness; difficulty staying awake
- Relying on days-off to catch up on sleep

Causes of poor sleep can be due to factors such as: anaemia (low red blood cell levels); compromised longer-term mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression); sleep apnoea. These require a specialised response beyond those suggested in this Brieflet.

Enough exercise, and good food and enough, are ... necessities. But sleep - good sleep, and enough of it - this is a necessity without which you cannot have the exercise of use, nor the food. E. E. Hale, 1892

Strategies to Maintain Effective Sleep Hygiene

Some *Sleep Hygiene Strategies* may include the use of sleep medication or a “night cap”. The former, in particular and under professional guidance, can be very effective in the short term. However, as these (especially alcohol, and in excess) tend to interrupt the quality of your natural sleep cycle, it helps to explore other, longer-term strategies. The following *Sleep Hygiene Strategies* are to add to those that you already have and to encourage your motivation to make active use of them regularly:

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Where leadership is a team responsibility

- Continuous- sleep undisturbed for 7-8 hours every 24 hours
- Bed- is for sleep and sex (not TV, phones, arguing, working, pets or children)
- Space - arrange comfortable: bedding, darkness, sound, clothing, temperature. Calm music or reading helps some people
- Routine- habituate to the same sleep and waking times, even on days off
- Eliminate - *for 2 hours or more before sleep*:
 - Stimulants - smoking and spicy food; caffeine for at least 8 hours. Also avoid visual stimulants, e.g.: TV, cellphones, computers as these and other blue light devices stimulate the brain neurologically as well as psychologically
 - Naps - unless they last less than 1 hour, and are 6 hours or so before bed
 - Worrying - at bedtime. Instead, create a 20-minute “Worry-Time”, prioritising concerns on a list if needed. Tell yourself you can return to it the next day. Focus, in appreciative detail, on even a small thing that went well the day before
- Regular Exercise - esp. aerobic, (2 hours or so before bed), in daylight if possible
- Healthy Diet - to sustain balanced energy throughout the day
- Good Mental Health - get to know some good Relaxation, and Gratitude Exercises (refer to the Calm link below)
- Fall Back Asleep - relax: don't worry! Perhaps visualise a relaxing scenario in detail. If you're still awake after 15 minutes, get out of bed. Do something boring until you are tired. Then either go straight back to bed, or re-start your going-to-bed routine. A short shower to restore a more comfortable body temperature can help.

Like the rest of what is important to you, your *Sleep Hygiene* requires your ongoing effort and commitment. Whilst there are increased health risks linked to poor *Sleep Hygiene* (obesity, diabetes, poor mental health), there are even more benefits linked to good *Sleep Hygiene*: renewed energy, improved outlook and quality of life, better decision making, greater mental alertness, better connection with others ...

Sleeping is no mean art: for its sake one must stay awake all day. F. Nietzsche

Sources for your further interest

<http://www.bssnz.co.nz>

<http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz/18.html>

<http://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/improving-sleep-a-guide-to-a-good-nights-rest>

<https://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-diary/SleepDiaryv6.pdf>

<http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/sleep-benefits-10/slideshow-sleep-tips>

Sam Farmer is Owner-Director of Enhance Facilitation Limited and strongly advocates that leadership is a team responsibility. He is strength-based in his approach and passionate about collaborative coaching. He also provides professional supervision, and psychosocial support to professionals working within high emotional impact contexts. A registered psychologist and bound by the Psychologists' Code of Ethics, he has regular professional supervision. **Sam coaches and facilitates professionals and teams working in shift-work and “long day” contexts, such as first responders and humanitarian staff. He also works with professionals operating in high demand, limited-resource environments. Please contact him if you would like to enhance your *Sleep Hygiene Strategies* and motivation.**

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