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The Power of Sleep
Why it's so important for our mental health

Sleep is essential for our overall wellbeing, yet it is often overlooked in our fast-paced lives. Lucy Thalayasingam, our Counselling Clinical Lead, believes quality sleep plays a vital role in helping us process emotions, manage stress, and feel more resilient in the face of challenges. When we struggle with sleep, it can have a serious impact on our mood, anxiety levels, and overall mental wellbeing.

Why sleep matters for mental health

Sleep and mental health are closely linked. When we're well-rested we can think more clearly, regulate our emotions, and cope with daily stresses. On the other hand, poor sleep can make us feel irritable, overwhelmed, and less able to handle life's ups and downs.

Stress and anxiety are common culprits when it comes to sleep problems. Racing thoughts, worries, or a sense of dread can keep us awake at night, making it harder to fall or stay asleep. Over time, lack of sleep can contribute to increased stress, mood swings, and even symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The impact of poor sleep on our minds

When we don't get enough rest, it can take a toll on our emotional and psychological wellbeing. Some common effects include:

Increased anxiety	**Low mood and irritability**	**Difficulty concentrating**	**Feeling disconnected**
Lack of sleep can make us more reactive to stress and cause feelings of unease or panic.	Poor sleep can lead to heightened emotions, making it harder to stay positive and patient.	Struggling with focus and memory can make everyday tasks feel overwhelming.	Lack of sleep can affect motivation, making us feel detached from social activities and relationships.

The natural light and dark cycle of the day helps your body know when it's time to be awake and alert, and when it's time to wind down and get some shut-eye. If your eyes are constantly glued to bright lights, ie phones, TV screens, video games - how is your body supposed to know it's time to rest? In short, it won't!

Breaking the cycle: How to improve your sleep and mental wellbeing

The good news is that making small changes to our daily routine can improve both sleep and mental health. Here are some simple ways to develop better sleep habits:

1. Create a wind-down routine
A relaxing bedtime routine can help signal to your brain that it's time to sleep. Try reading, listening to calming music, or practising mindfulness before bed.

2. Manage stress and worries
If your mind races at night, keeping a journal or writing down your thoughts before bed can help clear your head. Meditation and breathing exercises can also ease tension and promote relaxation.

3. Keep a consistent sleep schedule
Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day helps regulate your body's internal clock, making it easier to fall asleep and wake up feeling refreshed.

4. Limit screen time before bed
The blue light from phones, laptops, and televisions can interfere with sleep. Try switching off devices at least 30 minutes before bed and replacing screen time with a calming activity.

5. Create a restful sleep environment
Your bedroom should be a relaxing space. Keeping it dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature can make a big difference in the quality of your sleep.

6. Watch your caffeine and alcohol intake
Caffeine and alcohol can disrupt sleep, so try to avoid them in the hours leading up to bedtime.

7. Get moving during the day
Regular physical activity can help reduce stress and improve sleep, but try to avoid intense exercise right before bedtime.

Fact:
While you sleep, your busy brain cells finally get some time for self-care. Every night they restore their internal balance, or homeostasis, and strengthen their connections (synapses) with other brain cells.

Mindfulness and sleep

Mindfulness has been shown to be an effective way to improve sleep and mental wellbeing. Practising mindfulness; whether through meditation, breathing exercises, or gentle yoga; can help quiet a busy mind and create a sense of calm before bedtime.

Many people find that mindfulness helps reduce anxious thoughts and allows them to focus on the present moment, making it easier to drift off to sleep. Even just a few minutes of deep breathing or guided meditation before bed can make a big difference.

Final thoughts

Struggling with sleep can be frustrating, but small changes in your routine can lead to big improvements in both your rest and your mental health. If sleep problems persist, it may be helpful to speak with a professional who can offer support and guidance tailored to your needs. By taking care of your sleep, you're also taking care of your mind and overall wellbeing. Good night.

Prioritising relaxation, reducing stress, and creating a sleep-friendly environment can help you feel more balanced and refreshed each day.