



### The Importance of Sleep

There are three essential ingredients that can benefit us in our mental health. The first, is activity and exercise, which lets us blow out the cobwebs of stress of anxiety that accumulate throughout the day, and help us release endorphins to help us feel good. The second is nutrition and a balanced diet, which helps all the cogs in our brains and bodies working as they should. And the third, of course is sleep. Emotional problems are registered in our bodies, and if our bodies are not working in optimal fashion, it is difficult to feel good and even to feel like ourselves.

Sleep is so important for our emotional health, and in fact it is so intertwined with mental health problems that it is even in the criteria for diagnosing depression. Emotional problems cause sleep problems, and vice versa. Sleep problems can actually cause emotional problems, and it certainly will exacerbate any pre-existing problems that you may have.

If you struggle with sleep, you will probably recognize a lot of truth in this, and of course this can be incredibly frustrating.

Your psychologist will be very interested in your sleep and sleep patterns, in order to help you toward wellness. Is your sleep disturbed in some way? Is it restorative? Is it broken? Do you have trouble falling asleep? Staying asleep? Do you suffer from nightmares that shock you awake, do you have fear about going to sleep? Do you sleep too much or wake still feeling tired?

The practice of keeping good routines and practices around sleep is referred to as “sleep hygiene”. Unless you suffer from a diagnosable sleep disorder, like any good skill, sleep can be taught. Many sleep problems occur as a result of not prioritizing sleep, not taking our self-care seriously enough, not having good routines and predictability in our days, or trying to use alcohol or drugs to coerce us into sleep (this is actually one of the worst things you can do, over the long term, it has the opposite to intended effect).

We teach new parents about sleep, and the importance of good quality sleep for newborns, because babies will become highly distressed if they aren't getting sleep (and this is distressing and chaotic for the parents). We can see that some babies are natural sleepers, and some babies are naturally less inclined toward sleep from the get-go. We are all different. And while on average, most people need at least 8 hours per night to get restorative sleep, we know that there are some exceptions, with some people requiring less and some more. As we get older, we are the ones responsible for our own sleep routines, and we are the ones causing distress and chaos for ourselves from lack of sleep. It doesn't always come naturally to prioritise sleep in quite the same way as we do for a newborn. However, it is clear from psychological research that we should.