

**'Sleep . . . balm of hurt minds . . . chief nourisher in life's feast'**

**– Macbeth –**

## ■ Useful information about sleeping

- ❶ There is no such thing as an ideal length of sleep. Some people need 10 hours, others need three. Napoleon, Churchill and Margaret Thatcher are all reported as only needing between three and four hours a night.
- ❷ As you grow older you require less sleep. A person who had 10 hours at 20 years old may require five or less at 60.
- ❸ There is no danger in losing a few nights sleep. People often assume they will become ill, or their performance will be impaired. Both fears are usually groundless.
- ❹ Your body will take all the sleep it needs unless forcibly prevented.
- ❺ Research into insomnia finds that people with sleeping difficulties consistently over-estimate how long it takes them to get to sleep and how much sleep they have had. The next day they are usually oversensitised to bodily symptoms, interpreting them as signs of tiredness.

## ■ Hints for getting to sleep

- ❶ Prepare yourself before going to bed:
  - ◆ Take exercise early in the day;
  - ◆ Avoid spicy or heavy food and caffeine in the few hours before you retire;
  - ◆ Have a milky drink before bed;
  - ◆ Take time to relax by having a warm bath or listening to restful music, or complete a relaxation exercise;
  - ◆ Make sure your bedroom is quiet and your bed is comfortable.
- ❷ Go to bed only when you are sleepy; do not try to get more sleep by going to bed early.

- ❸ Use your bed only for sleeping. Do not read, watch television or eat in bed unless you are sure by your past experience that these activities help you to sleep.
- ❹ When you are in bed, relax and do not think about worrying issues. If there is a problem, identify all your worrying thoughts by writing them down on a piece of paper earlier in the evening, and leave that piece of paper downstairs. If you are still worrying write down your worries. Then try to think about pleasant things.
- ❺ Distract yourself by playing mental games, such as remembering the names of your classmates at school, counting football teams in the league, or counting prime numbers.
- ❻ Carry out a muscle relaxation exercise. As you lie in bed tighten up and relax muscle groups in your body.
- ❼ If you have not fallen asleep in about 15 to 20 minutes, or if you wake up and cannot get back to sleep, then get out of bed and do something else until you feel sleepy. Don't lie there tossing and turning. Go to a different room and do something which is different and unstimulating like reading, or ironing. Return to bed after a break when you feel sleepy.
- ❽ Set your alarm and get up at the same time each morning regardless of how much sleep you received during the night.
- ❾ Turn the clock face away so you cannot see what time it is.
- ❿ Do not catnap during the day. Try to establish a regular routine for going to bed and getting up.