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Opening Times:

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

Further information & advice:

Rape Crisis Helpline
Freephone 08088 01 03 02
(6pm-midnight daily)
www.rapecrisscotland.org.uk

Breathing Space
0800 83 85 87 (6pm-2am)
www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Young Minds
020 7336 8445
www.youngminds.org.uk

Mind
0845 766 0163 (9.15am-5.15pm daily)
www.mind.org.uk/information/factsheets

Childline
0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

Samaritans
08457 90 90 90
www.samaritans.org

**Fife Rape & Sexual
Assault Centre**

(FRASAC)

**YOUNG
PERSONS'
PROJECT**

SLEEP PROBLEMS

**(INSOMNIA &
NIGHTMARES)**

WHY DO TRAUMA SURVIVORS SUFFER SLEEP PROBLEMS?

Many people have trouble sleeping sometimes. This is even more likely if you have suffered a traumatic event. Survivors of rape, sexual assault or childhood abuse very often experience problems with sleep. There are many reasons for this:

- * **CHANGES TO YOUR BRAIN:** You may feel you need to be “on guard” or “on the lookout” to protect yourself from danger. It’s difficult to have restful sleep when you always feel the need to be alert.
- * **MEDICAL PROBLEMS:** Medical problems, such as chronic pain, stomach problems and pelvic-area problems, make going to sleep difficult.
- * **YOUR THOUGHTS:** You may worry about general problems or worry that you are in danger. If you haven’t been able to sleep for several nights (or even weeks) you may start to worry that you won’t be able to fall asleep. These thoughts can keep you awake.
- * **DRUGS OR ALCOHOL:** You may be using drugs or alcohol to help you cope with your symptoms and what has happened to you. Drinking and drugs can make it more difficult to sleep.
- * **UPSETTING DREAMS OR NIGHTMARES:** Nightmares are very common and can wake you up in the middle of the night, making your sleep less restful. If you wake up in a panic after an upsetting dream, you may find it difficult to fall asleep because you’re afraid you might have a nightmare. See the section on Nightmares later in this booklet if you are having problems with these.
- * **HEARING NOISES:** Following a trauma people often wake up easily if they hear a noise. You may feel that you need to get up and check your room to make sure you are safe.
- * **SEX:** You may find that having sex triggers memories of the attack/abuse.
- * **THE DARK:** For those who have experience violent situations, night-time and darkness can, in themselves, bring about added anxiety and restlessness.

TIPS FOR NIGHTMARE SUFFERERS (continued)

- * If you normally leave a light on at night, try turning it off. If you normally read before you sleep, try not reading for a change.
- * Turn the radio off if you normally listen to it before sleep. If you don’t normally listen to the radio before sleep, try leaving a radio on to help you rest and feel safe.
- * Instead of surfing the Net or watching TV, change your routine and listen to music, read a book, arrange things for tomorrow.
- * Take a bath with music, candles, incense sticks; whatever work for you
- * Join a relaxation class and learn how to relax.
- * Reflect back aloud on the day you had, what went wrong, what could have been better and finish off with what you achieved. All this will work to put you in a calmer frame of mind ready for bed.
- * As with insomnia, avoid sleeping in the daytime. Sleeping at the wrong time upsets your internal body clock, so get into a routine, and sleep will come to you.

IF YOU WAKE UP IN A PANIC

Waking up panicking after a nightmare is a terrifying experience so:

- * Be kind to yourself immediately afterwards. Make yourself comfortable. Do whatever relaxation measures work for you.
- * Remind yourself that nightmares are part of the healing process.
- * Some people find that writing down what you’ve dreamt helps you to move on and go back to sleep, so have a pen and paper handy by your bedside.
- * Decide if you want to be on your own just now or not. It can be good to talk about how you’re feeling. If you have a partner who is willing to be woken up, tell them what’s happened and how you feel. Ask them for what support you need, whether it’s a cuddle or a cuppa.
- * If you’re on your own, is there anyone you can ring to talk it through? Consider calling the Samaritans if you’re feeling desperate to talk about what’s happened. Try to tell a supportive person as soon as is practical afterwards. Sharing the nightmare is a way of breaking the isolation and getting support with the terror of it.
- * Be gentle with yourself for the rest of the day. Be prepared for the nightmare to leave you feeling more vulnerable. This doesn’t make you weak or abnormal. Nightmares are an unpleasant part of the recovery process. It takes courage and strength to experience them and reach out for support.

COPING WITH NIGHTMARES

The past is behind you, beyond your ability to change it. However, you can affect the present, which will in turn transform the future. Whilst nightmares are difficult to cope with, some guidance might be useful:

- * Make sure that you have some 'talking' help with the abuse issues. Being able to talk with a trusted counsellor, therapist or friend should reduce the number and intensity of nightmares over time.
- * Remember that whilst they are terrifying, nightmares are also a painful part of healing. The mind is trying to make sense of what's happened to you.
- * Some people suggest that you can 'take charge' of your nightmare. In other words, turn the table on whoever is attacking or abusing you during the nightmare. Whilst this might be possible in some cases, it's certainly not true for everyone. Don't give yourself a hard time if this isn't true for you.
- * **"Take charge"** - as strange as it may seem, some people suggest that you can influence your dreams by planning your behaviour in them and changing how you act during them. You can shift from the role of passive victim to one of active participant. Instead of running or hiding, you can overcome the dream danger. By transforming your dream, you develop more confidence in dealing with waking threats.
- * **Start by changing any nightmare you have in some small way for the better.** Get help in your dream. Help yourself as much as you can; find shelter; ask other dream characters for assistance; plan to help those in trouble in your nightmares; save those in need; treat the injured. Look for any positive image in the dream you had, such as trying to call for help. Build on this as a base for improving the dream. Picture the help arriving. As you take action in your nightmare you will be helping yourself to gather your resources for coping in the waking world.
- * **Use your imagination to prepare for better dreams.** In the drowsy period before you fall asleep, picture your usual dream scenario. Now picture it changing for the better. Visualise what you would do to improve the dream: break free from the attacker; make telephone contact with rescuers. Make the dream better.
- * Each nightmare you can change for the better is another step towards recovery from the trauma

TIPS FOR NIGHTMARE SUFFERERS

To begin with you should take a look at changing your bedtime routine; this can take many forms. Here are just a few that could work:

- * Change the physical layout of your bedroom, perhaps moving the bed to somewhere that feels safer, maybe facing the door.

SLEEP TIPS FOR TRAUMA SURVIVORS

What can you do if you have problems sleeping?

YOUR ACTIVITIES DURING THE DAY:

- * Exercise during the day but not within 3-4 hours of you going to bed as it may make it harder to fall asleep.
- * Get outside during daylight hours; spending time in sunlight helps to reset your body's sleep and wake cycles.
- * Don't drink or eat anything that has caffeine in it such as coffee, tea, cola (and other fizzy drinks) and chocolate within a few hours of going to bed (unless it keeps you awake and helps you drive/work machinery safely).
- * Try not to drink any liquids after 6pm or so, if you wake up often because you have to go to the bathroom, then can't get back to sleep properly.
- * Try not to drink alcohol, smoke or use tobacco, especially in the evening, as nicotine and alcohol can keep you awake.
- * Try not to take naps during the day, especially close to bedtime.
- * Don't take medicine that may keep you awake or make you feel hyper right before bedtime. Speak to your doctor to find out if any of your medication might do this and ask if you can take it earlier in the day.
- * After your evening meal, set aside 20 minutes to think about how your day has gone. Write down what you have achieved and think about problem areas and anything you haven't finished. Write down your plan of how you intend to tackle the unfinished items/problems.
- * If you wake up worrying about something on your list, remind yourself that you have already written down a plan for the worry.
- * If it is a **new** worry and you can't stop thinking about it, **get out of bed** and add it to your planning list. Remind yourself that you will look at it closely the following day.

YOUR EVENING AND BEDTIME ROUTINE:

- * Don't do stressful or energising things in the evening. Use the second half of the evening to unwind. Set a deadline for doing work/activity at least 90 minutes before bedtime.
- * Don't eat too late as some foods cause the digestive system to work hard e.g. cheese, curry or meat.
- * Take a warm bath, listen to soothing music or drink a decaffeinated drink.

SLEEP TIPS FOR TRAUMA SURVIVORS (continued)

- * Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning—even if you feel tired.
- * Use a sleep mask and earplugs, if light and noise bother you.

YOUR SLEEPING AREA:

- * Sleep in a place where you will feel most rested and safe. While the bedroom is usually the best place to sleep, it may not be possible to rest there soon after the trauma, especially if you experienced violence in that room.
- * Only use your bedroom for sleeping (& sex if you wish).
- * Move the TV and radio out of your bedroom and keep it quiet, dark and cool. Use curtains or black-out blinds.
- * If keeping a nightlight on helps you feel safer, then consider keeping the room dimly lit.
- * If there is noise in your room which disturbs you though, consider using soothing music or a “white noise” machine to block out that noise.

TIPS ON HOW TO GET TO SLEEP:

- * Don't try too hard to fall asleep.
- * Tell yourself the “sleep will come when it's ready” and that “relaxing in bed is almost as good”.
- * Try to keep your eyes open in the darkened room and as they (naturally) try to close, tell yourself to “resist that for another few seconds”. This approach ‘tempts’ sleep to take over.
- * Try counting backwards from 99. If you get lost—start again!

IF YOU CAN'T SLEEP:

- * Imagine yourself in a peaceful, pleasant place. Focus on the details and feelings of being in a place that's relaxing.
- * Breathing Exercise — breathe out / breathe in slowly to the count of 1 elephant, 2 elephant, 3 elephant, 4 elephant / hold your breath for a count of four / breathe out slowly while counting elephants. Repeat the four steps until you begin to feel calm. Don't take too many breaths in a row or breathe too quickly or you will become dizzy.
- * Try repeating a neutral or peaceful word (such as “the” or “peace”) to yourself every few seconds.

SLEEP TIPS FOR TRAUMA SURVIVORS (continued)

- * If you can't sleep after about half an hour, get up and do a quiet or boring activity until you feel sleepy.
- * Don't take extra sleep to make up for a previous bad night. Set your alarm to the same rising time every day. If you wake before the alarm, try to lie quietly and enjoy the comfortable feeling of being in bed until you need to get up.
- * Some people find that keeping a Sleep Diary helps. It might help you to identify potential causes for your sleeplessness.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR:

- * If you can't sleep because you are in great pain, often feel anxious at night, or often have bad dreams or nightmares, talk to your doctor.
- * Sometimes insomnia can be caused by depression. There are a number of different medications that can be helpful for sleep problems.

STICK TO THE ABOVE ADVICE PROGRAMME FOR SEVERAL WEEKS IN ORDER TO SET UP A REGULAR PATTERN

NIGHTMARES

WHAT ARE NIGHTMARES?

If you are having nightmares after a trauma, be assured that it's a natural reaction. Nightmares are your mind trying to cope with the situation. It is actually a good sign that you are struggling to make sense of what has happened to you.

Nightmares refer to elaborate dreams that cause high levels of anxiety or terror. In general, the content of nightmares revolves around imminent harm being caused to the individual (such as being chased, threatened or injured). A rape or abuse survivor might experience disturbing dreams about the rape or some aspect of the experience that was particularly frightening.

Nightmares can occur very rarely, occasionally or multiple times in the same night; everyone's different. When individuals awaken from nightmares, they can usually remember them in detail and often report feelings of terror, alertness, anxiety and panic.