

TIRED ALL THE TIME

This booklet was produced by the Clinical Psychology Service of Northampton Health Authority. It forms part of a series of booklets that are designed to provide people with information that will reassure, advise and encourage them.

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INTRODUCTION:

We all get tired at times and for very different reasons.

For many of us the normal function of sleep enables us to recharge our batteries and relieve the feelings of tiredness we may be experiencing. Sleep also enables the body to recover from the stresses of daily living so that we can continue to function effectively on a daily basis.

However, for many people, sleeping the average 8 hours/night is not enough. They continue to feel tired all the time.

This is what some people have complained of:

- ☞ *“I feel run down just don't feel right”*
- ☞ *“I sleep for a few hours but wake up and can't get back to sleep again”*
- ☞ *“Sleep doesn't refresh me – I can't get out of bed in the morning”*

Perhaps you can identify with these feelings and that is why you have agreed with your GP to look at other ways of helping yourself to feel better. Your GP may already have decided to explore the possibility of there being a physical cause to your tiredness. This will be something that he/she will discuss with you.

Any questions or worries you have about your physical health need to be directed to your doctor.

There are other reasons why people feel constantly tired. The aim of this self-help booklet is to **help you identify** what might be the underlying reasons for your feelings of tiredness. Once you have identified the cause[s] of your tiredness, you can then go on looking at ways to **help yourself further**.

THE REASONS THAT PEOPLE FEEL “TIRED ALL THE TIME”

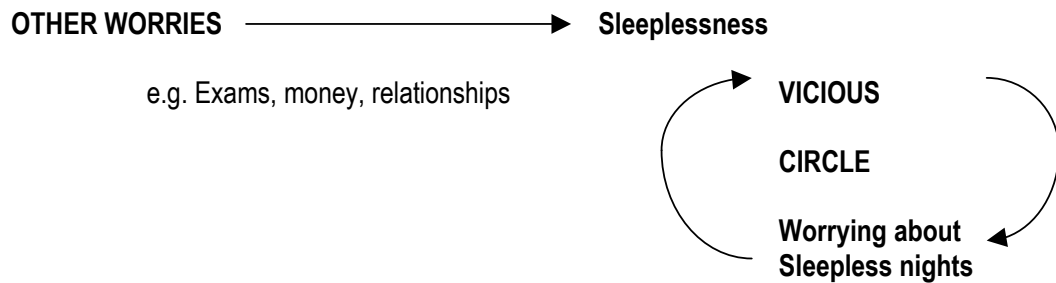
The reasons people feel constantly tired tend to fall into three main categories. [Remember, we are not considering the role that physical illness might play in how you feel].

1. **DIFFICULTY SLEEPING:** We all sleep, but many people wish they could sleep better. Most of us have experienced difficulties in sleeping at some time in our lives – around 15% of all patients attending their family doctor complain of it.

Sleep is considered by most people to be essential to healthy functioning so difficulty sleeping can be a source of considerable worry. Often insomnia [i.e. problems of getting to sleep or of staying asleep] can start from a few sleepless nights caused by worries unconnected with sleep itself.

However, for many people these worries that initially made sleep difficult can be overridden by anxiety about the insomnia itself. Often these new worries centre around the effects the insomnia

might be having on their health, or on their performance the next day at work, school or home. The person might say to themselves something like – “I must get 8 hours sleep or I’ll be awful tomorrow”.



Existing in this vicious cycle can be a miserable and exhausting experience. Your days may have become preoccupied with fears about not sleeping the next night.

How much sleep are you getting ?

Sleep is a bit like appetite. Some people need lots of food, others never seem to eat as much. **There is no “norm” where sleep is concerned.** It depends on the individual. Your view of how much sleep you have had and how much you need is subjective. Only you know whether your need for sleep feels satisfied or not.

EXERCISE:

The aim of this exercise is to help you to examine your own sleeping pattern and assess whether there are things that you are doing which might be interfering with your ability to get to sleep or to stay asleep.

Record here the answers to these questions:

- I. Do you wake during the night ?
- II. How long, on average do you stay awake for ?
- III. How do you try to get off to sleep again ?
- IV. How many hours of sleep are you getting on average ?
- V. How many hours of sleep do you think you ought to be having ?
- VI. Do you worry during the day about not getting enough sleep ?
- VII. Suppose the problem were to worsen over the next month, what is the worst thing that could happen ?
- VIII. What time on average do you go to bed at night ?
- IX. Describe your bedtime routine:
Do you smoke ?

- Do you read every night before going to sleep ?
- Do you use the bed to study on/sit on during the day ?
- Is your bedroom warmed up before you go to bed ?
- Do you practice any relaxation technique before going to bed ?

If you have some difficulty in answering any of these questions it may be helpful to record your sleeping habits – in diary form – for a short period [over one week perhaps]. This may make it easier to identify your sleeping pattern more clearly and accurately.

Examine your answers to this exercise. Do you notice anything ? This exercise may have helped you to become more aware of your sleep habits/routines. It should also have enabled you to identify any problems that may be contributing to your difficulty sleeping.

If this is the case and you believe your tiredness is caused by difficulty sleeping, please turn to the back of this booklet under the section “**What to do Next**”.

2. **STRESS** is another reason for a person being “Tired all the Time”

Stress has its origins in the need to survive. When primitive people had to hunt to stay alive they faced the constant threat of being hunted themselves.

Imagine you are back in the Stone Age. You step outside your cave and there charging up the valley towards you is a large, prehistoric beast. It is a large and shaggy mammoth, 14 feet high with long tusks. What do you do ? You have two main options. You can jump out of the way and run for safety or you can stand your ground and fight. But above all, you need to react quickly; there is not much time to think.

This primitive ability to get yourself out of trouble fast is still part of our make-up today. It is known as the **fight or flight response** and it is part of your body’s programming.

Most of the threats we have to deal with today are directed at our **psychological selves** rather than at our physical survival. If your boss “tears a strip off” you at work your body may gear up as if to fight him/her. However, this is not a very appropriate response [you may get the sack – certainly if you take the “fight” option], and so you are unable to “work off” your body’s high state of physical arousal.

When the body is repetitively in a state of preparation for fight or flight, the short-term physical changes designed to get you out of danger can in themselves be harmful and are listed below: [Remember, people do not usually have problems in all these areas. Many people develop problems in one or two in particular].

- ☞ **The heart rate can be permanently raised, resulting in hypertension otherwise known as HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE**
- ☞ **The rapid and shallow breathing which increases the supply of oxygen can lead to HYPERVENTILATION causing dizziness, tingling in the arms and legs, tightness across the chest and a feeling of not being able to take a satisfying breath**
- ☞ **Prolonged release of chemicals [called corticoids] by the body’s adrenal glands NEGATIVELY AFFECTS THE ABILITY OF YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM [The system that fights disease] TO RESPOND**

∞ Muscle tension over a prolonged period leads to PAIN IN THE MUSCLES PARTICULARLY IN THE NECK, SHOULDERS AND BACK

∞ The changes in the resistance of the surface of the skin due to sweating make it prone to RASHES AND SKIN DISEASE

∞ Other stress related ailments include:

Migraine
Hay fever and allergies
Peptic ulcers
Constipation
Colitis
Menstrual difficulties
Flatulence and Indigestion
Overactive Thyroid Gland
Diabetes
Depression

Such stress and its symptoms can be caused by a variety of things that occur in our lives such as:

I. **Putting too much effort into daily living – for example:**

- ∞ Work
- ∞ Finances
- ∞ Marital problems
- ∞ Family problems

II. **Life events:**

Major upheavals e.g. moving house, are often very stressful, although at the time people may not realise the extent of the emotional adjustments they are having to make. Also a number of smaller changes – or life events – over a short period of time can add up to a person being stressed which they may be slow to recognise. Also some people get into the habit of worrying about something that hasn't actually happened – but which could. Worrying about life events that could occur may be as stressful as reacting to those that already have.

If, on top of this extra effort we are putting into our daily living and handling life events, we are also unable to relax, we can start to **feel tired**, lethargic, frustrated and sometimes depressed. These feelings all lower your ability to cope with stress and leave you open to pressures which previously you would have coped with easily.

EXERCISE:

The earlier you realise that you are under strain the sooner you can do something to help yourself. Ask yourself the following questions:

I. **Is my lifestyle getting me down ?**

Make the connection between how you are feeling and the pressures you are faced with every day

II. **Do I have too much to do ? Am I taking on too much responsibility at home/work ?**

Are there things I could hand over to other people ?
Do all the things I take on need to be done at all ?
Could I do things in a more leisurely way ?
Do I find it difficult to unwind and relax ?

The answers to these questions may give you a clearer idea of how the way you are feeling is being influenced by your **lifestyle**.

III. **Have you recently stopped to consider the changes that have taken place in your life over the past 12 months ?**

Sometimes people cope with one off events very well but what may happen is that they seem to manage very well at the time and then notice a change in the way they feel later on.

LIFE EVENT RATING SCALE:

How many of the following have you experienced in the last 12 months ?

Moved House	<input type="text"/>
Separation from loved one/end of relationship. Marital problems	<input type="text"/>
Problems with family/friends	<input type="text"/>
Got married/moved in with partner	<input type="text"/>
Had a child	<input type="text"/>
Work related problems	<input type="text"/>
Threat of redundancy	<input type="text"/>
Changed jobs	<input type="text"/>

Financial difficulties

Illness of self/family

Death of close family/friends

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Pregnancy

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Difficult relationship with parents/children

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What has this exercise told you ? Have you experienced a number of major life events over the last 12 months ? There may be other life events that you have experienced – these are just examples. Perhaps there is a link between how you are feeling now and what has happened to you over the last 12 months.

WHAT TO DO NEXT ?

The aim of the exercise in this booklet has been to help you identify the possible reasons why you may be feeling **tired all the time**.

Have you identified the underlying cause for the way you are feeling ?

- ☞ **Difficulty sleeping**
- ☞ **Putting too much effort into daily living**
- ☞ **Can't relax**
- ☞ **Worrying about life events and feeling anxious/depressed**

Remember we are not looking at physical causes for the way you are feeling – this is something you need to discuss with your GP.

The next step is to do something about the cause of the problem

The Clinical Psychology Service produced a number of self-help booklets aimed at helping you to understand your problems and to help you to improve the way you feel.

- ☞ **INSOMNIA – What to do when you can't sleep**
- ☞ **STRESS – What it is and what to do about it**
- ☞ **LEARNING TO RELAX – Booklet and cassette tape**
- ☞ **COPING WITH DEPRESSION – Booklet and cassette tape**

If you would like a copy of one of the above booklets, then please inform your therapist

The first step to improving the way that you feel is being able to make the link between your emotional/physical health and the way you lead your life/deal with problems.

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