

FACT SHEET:

# Alcohol & Insomnia

Find out why alcohol affects your sleep and read about ways to help get a good night's sleep. Sleep is the body's natural 'maintenance time'. Getting enough of it, in particular deep sleep, is essential for mental and physical well-being.

## What is insomnia?

Insomnia is a disorder that prevents a normal night's sleep. A person with insomnia will have difficulty falling asleep or may wake up after several hours of restless sleep.

Some people drink alcohol before bedtime thinking it will make them sleepy, however it can have the opposite effect.

## How does alcohol affect sleep?

Alcohol dehydrates the body, and if we drink at night, the dehydration will cause restless sleep or even an inability to sleep. It can also act as a stimulant, which can make insomnia more severe.

Drinking alcohol disturbs our brain rhythms and stops us getting enough of the deep sleep we need to feel rested and refreshed in the morning. Being tired all the time makes life more difficult to cope with and contributes to stress.

Research shows that people who often drink alcohol are more at risk of developing insomnia over time.

## Insomnia and alcohol dependence

One of the problems about using alcohol to sleep is that this can often delay a person from seeking treatment and help.

This can often mean that the insomnia progresses and using alcohol as a sleep remedy can bring about a dependency on alcohol.

## Ten solutions for a good night's sleep

1. Take some moderate exercise during the day
2. Drink warm milk or chamomile tea in place of alcohol
3. Listen to relaxing restful music in the evening
4. Gradually unwind in the last two hours before going to bed - do some light reading, meditation or have a bath
5. Visualise yourself in a pleasant place for example on a warm, sunny, quiet beach
6. Have a light snack just before going to bed
7. Go to bed at the same time each evening
8. Have a quiet, darkened sleeping area
9. Use ear plugs and a sleep mask to cut out any external distractions
10. Get up at the same time every day and don't lie in, get up and get going when you wake up.

## Ten things that prevent a good night's sleep

1. Drinking alcohol in the last few hours before going to bed
2. Drinking caffeinated drinks in the evening (coffee, tea, fizzy drinks)
3. Not drinking any water to rehydrate your body
4. Watching TV or using the computer just before going to bed
5. Going to bed hungry or after eating a heavy meal
6. Smoking cigarettes at night
7. Having lots of late nights and sleeping in
8. Using your sleeping area to do work or anything that requires a lot of concentration
9. Having naps during the day
10. Doing exercise in the last two hours before going to bed

## If you wake up during the night

It's normal to wake briefly during the night but if you're waking up and having trouble falling back asleep, the following tips may help.

- **Do a quiet, non-stimulating activity:** If you've been awake for more than 15 minutes, try getting out of bed and doing a quiet activity. Keep the lights dim so as not to cue your body clock that it's time to wake up. A light snack or herbal tea might help relax you, but be careful not to eat so much that your body begins to expect a meal at that time of the day.
- **Shift your thoughts:** If you have a nightmare or any bad thoughts, write them down and talk to someone about it at the next opportunity. Focus on a different, more positive ending for your bad dreams or thoughts. Recall your happiest experiences and memories and focus on those.
- **Write it down:** Spend a few minutes writing down anything that is on your mind. Ask yourself, 'what problem do I need to solve?' Whatever it is, don't be afraid to identify it. Write down what actions you will take the next day to help resolve the situation.
- **Stretch and breathe:** Do some soothing simple stretches either in bed or on the floor. A great one to do is the child's pose. Sit on your knees and fold forward with arms outstretched. You will feel a wonderful release in your arms, shoulders, and back. After that, do any stretches that you sense would feel good. Then lie down and take several long slow breaths in and out. Breathe in for a count of 8, hold for 8, and breathe out for a count of 16. This will help slow down your body and mind.
- **Stay relaxed:** As hard as it may be, try not to get stressed about difficulties with sleep, as this will keep your body awake. Rest and relaxation can help to rejuvenate your body even if you are unable to fall asleep. Focus on relaxation instead of sleep.

# Taking the next step

For support and further information available in Fife or Tayside please contact:

## FASS Alcohol Support Service

Call us in confidence on

**01592 206200**

Access online help and support

**[www.fassaction.org.uk](http://www.fassaction.org.uk)**

**[f](#) @FASSFife | [t](#) @FASSFife**

## Tayside Council on Alcohol

Call us in confidence on

**01382 456012**

Access online help and support

**[www.alcoholtayside.com](http://www.alcoholtayside.com)**

Other National information and support can be accessed through the following organisations:

**Alcohol Focus Scotland:** [www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** Helpline: 0800 9177 650 | [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

**The Sleep Council:** Freephone leaflet line: 0800 018 7923 | [www.sleepcouncil.com](http://www.sleepcouncil.com)

**Drinkline (Advice and support):** 0800 731 4314

*This fact sheet has been developed by colleagues from TCA and FASS to support positive changes in risky alcohol use. Partners in the project wish to acknowledge the experience and information resources used within the network of local councils on alcohol which have informed this resource.*

*TCA receives funding from NHS Tayside, Angus Council, Dundee City Council, Perth and Kinross Council. FASS receives core funding from NHS Fife and Fife Council.*