

Working Parents and Sleep

Being a parent of young children can be a source of tremendous joy but can also result in many sleepless nights. This can be even more challenging when you have to get up early to go to work. We have devised some tips to help you through those times when your child is waking up during the night. Should you wish to discuss any concerns you have in relation to this or any other issue please contact the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) by phone at 0761000 030 or e-mail cseas@per.gov.ie. For individual Employee Assistance Officer's details, click on the 'meet the team' photo on our website www.cseas.per.gov.ie.

Tips to improve the quality and duration of your sleep:

- Have a good sleep routine for both you and your family – go to bed and get up at regular times
- Try to go to bed early, don't stay up late doing housework or watching television. Thirty minutes extra sleep is more valuable than dozing through an episode of a television show!
- If you can, do something relaxing before bedtime, such as reading or taking a bath
- Where possible, avoid looking at bright screens for 2/3 hours before bed. If not possible, try to keep screen time to a minimum.
- Practice a short mindfulness exercise to help you relax (see CSEAS information leaflet on Mindfulness)
- If you are struggling to sleep, try deep breathing (each exhale should be longer than each inhale)
- If your thoughts are keeping you awake, it may be helpful to write them down.
- If you go to bed and don't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and go to another room to do a relaxing activity such as reading or listening to music. When you start to feel sleepy, go back to bed. Lying awake in bed can create an unhealthy link between your sleeping environment and wakefulness.
- If you are awake during the night, don't watch the clock as this will only create more stress – if you don't need to know the time, consider putting visible clocks out of sight
- Don't try to force sleep as it's likely this will have the opposite effect
- Where possible, use your weekends for rest and relaxation
- If there are two of you at home and your child is waking at night, take turns getting up during the night or allow each other to have a lie in
- Where possible have someone babysit once in a while so you can rest



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Relaxation/Naps:



- If you commute to work by public transport you could use the time to relax. Perhaps read something or listen to music.
- Where possible take a nap at lunchtime (e.g. in your car, if you drive to work). Remember to set your alarm!
- If there are two of you at home in the morning can you take turns lying on?

In the morning:

- Upon waking avoid temptation to hit the snooze button. Hitting snooze can have a negative impact on your body's natural waking process and may cause you to feel groggy.
- Have a glass of water by your bed and take a few sips to wake you up
- Having a shower will help to get your circulation going

Exercise:

- When in work move around for a few minutes at least every 90 minutes. You could go get some water, walk to the printer or walk to a colleague rather than sending an e-mail.
- Do some exercises at your desk
- The benefits of exercise are cumulative so try and get a few minutes of exercise each day – ten minutes walk per day is seventy minutes per week. Perhaps you could use the stairs instead of a lift, get off public transport at an earlier stop and walk the rest of your journey or park a little bit further away from your destination.



Fresh air:



- Go outside and get some fresh air when you can
- If it is not possible to go outside, splash cold water on your wrists and face or open a window

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Nutrition:

- Eat for energy. Complex carbohydrates such as oats, whole wheat breads/pastas, brown rice, quinoa and legumes provide a slow and steady release of energy. Snacks which will give you an energy boost include bananas, fruit with nut butter or a handful of nuts, yoghurt, hummus and oatcakes. Keep some snacks in your desk drawer/car or bag.
- Stay hydrated (aim for at least 8 glasses of water per day)
- Don't take too much caffeine. Caffeine is known for the energy boost it provides. However, you may experience rebound fatigue when it leaves your system. Excessive amounts of caffeine can lead to insomnia. Perhaps don't drink or eat any beverages/foods containing caffeine in the hours before bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol as this can disrupt your sleep. While alcohol feels like it can help you to fall asleep, the evidence is clear that it leads to poor quality sleep and frequent waking during the night.



Driving:

- If you are feeling tired when driving STOP and take a 15 minute nap if you can. If your child is with you and you can't nap, if it is safe to do so step out of the car and get some air. If you are not able to stop, open the window.
- If you can, have a cold drink or a coffee
- Keep a face cloth or wipes in your car that you can use to refresh your face

In work:

- Prioritise tasks
- If you are a morning person you could tackle the toughest tasks first. Night owls might deal better with challenges a little later in the day.
- Before you go home prioritise your tasks for the next day
- Separate 'must dos' from 'nice to dos' (this also applies to housework)

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How to cope if your child wakes at night:



- Expect to be woken from your sleep during the night, this will hopefully help to reduce your frustration and stress
- Remember it's ok to break the rules sometimes e.g. having children in your bed if it means you will all have a more restful night's sleep. This is not recommended for very young children due to the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Find a friend in a similar situation, you can support each other

Suggestions for improving your child's sleep*:

- Try to help your child to sleep more soundly by looking at ways of improving their sleep environment e.g. giving them a comfort toy/blanket, invest in blackout curtains/blinds, play soft music or white noise.
- If you haven't already, develop a child sleep routine (you can get advice from your Public Health Nurse (PHN), GP or online)
- Night feeds: You may wish to continue feeding your child at night. However, if your child is over six months and you want to eliminate night feeds you should discuss with your GP or PHN whether your child requires a night feed or if they are just feeding out of habit or for comfort. If it transpires that they do not need this feed for nutritional reasons and you wish to stop feeding at night, you can obtain advice on eliminating these feeds from your PHN or GP.
- If your child is old enough, talk to them about sleeping. Praise them when their sleep improves and encourage them to get up when it's bright, not dark. Encourage self-soothing. Talk to them about why parents need sleep too.
- Talk over the day with your child to try and reduce any anxiety they may have which could cause them to wake at night
- Ensuring your child gets plenty of physical exercise and mental stimulation during the day may result in them being sufficiently tired to have an uninterrupted sleep

*These are general suggestions, however it is important to note that your child's sleeping pattern can vary at times and be impacted by a range of factors including teething, illness and transitions in their life, etc.

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