



University Hospitals Bristol  
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service  
**Bristol Royal Infirmary**

# Alcohol and insomnia



Respecting everyone  
Embracing change  
Recognising success  
Working together  
**Our hospitals.**

**Above  
& Beyond**  
Fundraising for Bristol city centre hospitals



**Sleep is the body's natural 'maintenance time'. Getting enough 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 use alcohol before bedtime thinking it will make them feel sleepy; however, it can have the opposite effect.

## **How does alcohol affect sleep?**

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

People who drink alcohol regularly are more at risk of developing insomnia over time.

## **Insomnia and alcohol dependence**

One of the problems about using alcohol to sleep is that it can delay people in getting treatment and help. This can often mean that the insomnia can become worse, and the use of alcohol as an aid for sleeping can lead to an alcohol dependency problem.

## Top solutions to a good night's sleep:

- do some moderate exercise in the day
- drink a warm caffeine-free drink before bed instead of alcohol
- listen to relaxing restful music in the evening
- gradually unwind in the last two hours before going to bed; do some light reading, meditation or have a bath
- visualise yourself in a pleasant place, for example on a warm sunny beach
- have a light snack before going to bed
- go to bed at the same time each night
- have a quiet, darkened sleeping area
- use earplugs and a sleep mask to cut out any external distractions
- get up at the same time every day and don't lie in; get up and get going when you wake up.

## **Top things that prevent a good night's sleep:**

- drinking alcohol in the last few hours before going to bed
- having caffeinated drinks in the evenings (such as coffee, tea, fizzy drinks)
- not drinking any water to rehydrate your body
- watching TV or using the computer before going to bed
- going to bed hungry or after a heavy meal
- smoking cigarettes at night
- having lots of late nights and sleeping in
- using your sleeping area to do work or anything that requires a lot of concentration
- having naps during the day
- doing exercise in the last two hours before going to bed.

**If you are having trouble sleeping on a regular basis, it may be helpful to discuss this with your GP.**

# Contacts

ROADS: 0117 440 0540 (Bristol)

DHI: 01454 868 750 (South Gloucestershire)

Addaction: 01934 427 940 (Weston-Super-Mare)

Advocacy service: 0117 980 0376

Alcoholics anonymous Bristol: 0117 926 5926 or 24 hour service:  
0117 926 5520 or the national helpline: 0800 917 7650

SMART Recovery: 0117 922 2364

SWAN Project: 0117 989 2521

Hawksprings: 0117 964 2859

NHS Advice: 111

Drinkline: 0800 917 8282 (9am – 11pm, Monday to Friday)

[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

[www.nhs.uk/drinkcheck](http://www.nhs.uk/drinkcheck)

**For loved ones, family and friends of someone who has alcohol problems**

DHI: 0117 916 6588

Al-Anon: 0800 0086 811

**Adapted from:**  
Tayside Council on Alcohol and Fife Alcohol Support Service.

As well as providing clinical care, our Trust has an important role in research. This allows us to discover new and improved ways of treating patients.

While under our care, you may be invited to take part in research. To find out more please visit:

**[www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation)**  
or call the research and innovation team on  
**0117 342 0233.**

For access to other patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:

**[www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/information-for-patients/](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/information-for-patients/)**

**Hospital switchboard: 0117 923 0000**



**Minicom: 0117 934 9869**



**[www.uhbristol.nhs.uk](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk)**



For an interpreter or signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



For this leaflet in large print, audio, or PDF format, please email [patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk](mailto:patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk).

