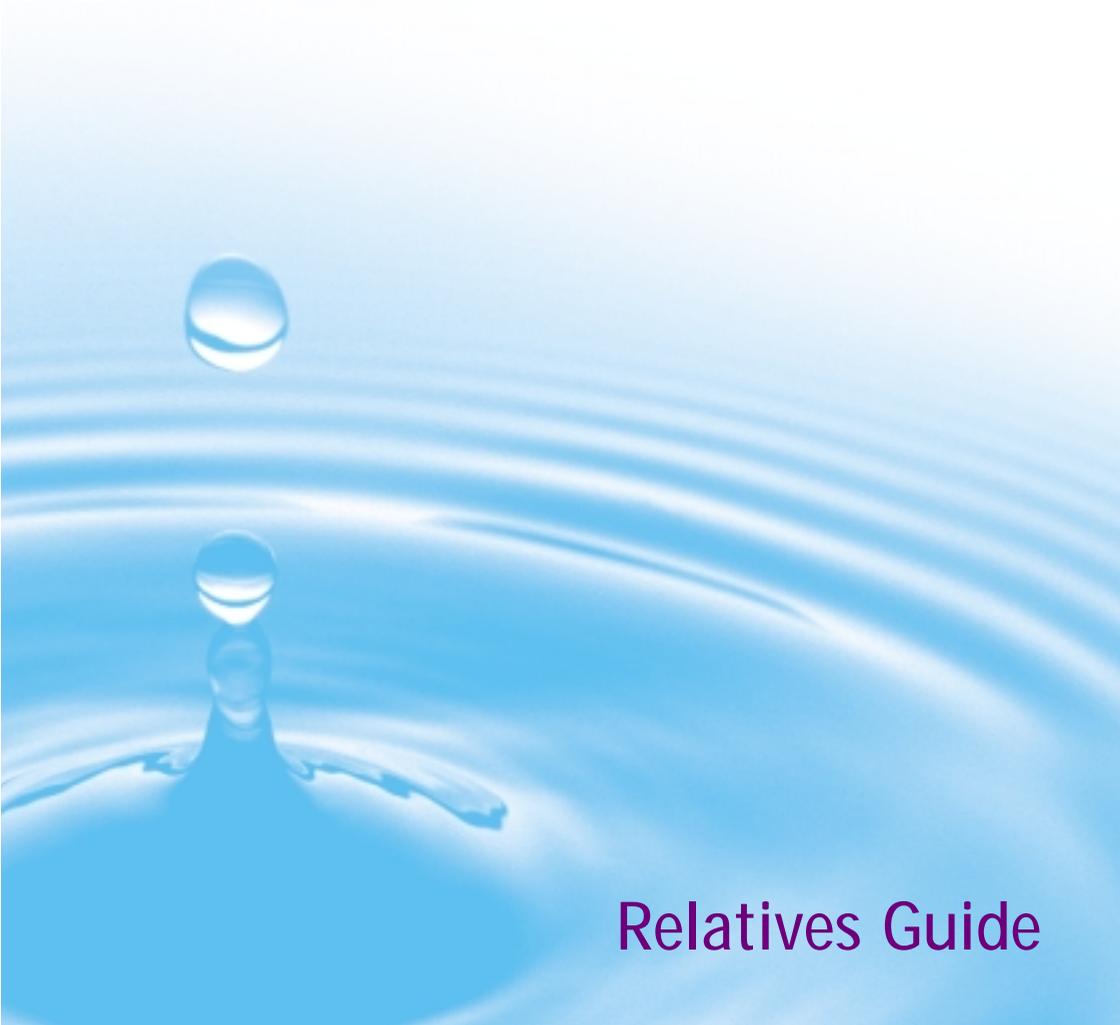


Sudden death
Insomnia and sleep disturbance
in adults and adolescents



Relatives Guide

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The ROYAL
HOSPITALS



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Sleep

Sleep is essential for your health, memory, concentration, and energy. Without sleep, people find it hard to work and get things done. Most of us do things around bedtime that make us sleepy and ready for bed. Some people use warm milk, a favourite book, or late-night TV to help them settle down. Others don't like TV or reading close to bedtime, and won't find it relaxing. The things you do before bedtime (especially the last hour beforehand) strongly effect your ability to sleep.

Different people need different amounts of sleep to stay healthy, so there is no definite amount of sleep you should have.

Dreaming and traumatic grief

As well as adding to your physical well-being, sleep also allows us to dream. We use dreams to make sense of our emotions, organise our memories, and prepare ourselves for the day to come. Dreams can be senseless, enjoyable, or utterly terrifying, but they all have a use. Nightmares and upsetting dreams are normal following a shock or sudden event. Some dreams might be about what happened or about the person who died. These usually become less frightening and more general as you come to terms with what happened.

Sometimes dreams can be so vivid or upsetting that they wake you up. Other times someone else might wake you up because you are having a nightmare. Dreams that don't end naturally are the most distressing and least helpful because they are more likely to be remembered. If you start remembering your bad dreams, spend time thinking about their underlying causes, or ask other people not to wake you up even if you are having a bad dream.

What are sleep disturbances?

Sleep disturbance can be:

- difficulty getting to sleep
- difficulty getting good quality sleep
- difficulty staying asleep – nightwaking or waking very early in the morning

Usually people are able to work out their ideal sleeping pattern by themselves, but sometimes our sleeping habits will change. Everyone has difficulty sleeping at some stage in their lives. Usually this is temporary, most likely caused by one of the following:

- stress or difficulty relaxing
- background noise
- high or low temperatures
- changing where you sleep (sleeping in a different room/bed)
- change of sleeping hours or bedtime
- side effects of medication, drugs, or alcohol

What makes sleep disturbance worse?

- Drinking tea, coffee, and caffeine drinks at night
- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking before you go to bed
- Lack of exercise
- Napping during the day
- Not having a regular bedtime
- Watching TV throughout the night
- Changes to your bedtime routine
- Worrying about not sleeping

Long term or chronic sleep disturbance can be harder to overcome, and will effect your emotions, concentration, work, appearance, and health.

Sleep disturbance is normal following a sudden death. With time, your sleeping patterns should return to normal without any outside help; however, there are some things you can do which help many people overcome their sleeping difficulties.



Improving sleep

You may find that, following a sudden death, you cannot relax or get to sleep like you used to. Relaxation, exercise, diet, and planning are ways of improving sleep that do not carry risk and are useful in the long and short term.¹

Awareness and Preparation – there are hundreds of cures for sleep disturbance: it is important you decide on what works for you. Some people need to sleep with music on and some people need total silence. Only you can make these individual choices. Try out different things and see what works for you.

Remember that your sleeping habits change over time. For example, it is normal to be uneasy for a while after a sudden death, and you may want to sleep with a light on or in a room with someone else. These are natural feelings, and not being alone or in the dark helps people to relax and get to sleep quicker. However, in the long term, going to sleep with a light on is not always practical or useful, so you may gradually want to go back to sleeping in the dark.

Distraction – thoughts and memories of what happened can sometimes stop you getting to sleep (or back to sleep). These thoughts can be brought on by a dream or nightmare, by something that reminded you of what happened, or sometimes at random. Distraction is a good way of dealing with these thoughts if they prevent sleep. It involves:

- switching your attention away from images or thoughts that are keeping you awake before they can play out in your head
- focussing on a sensation, image, memory, or action (e.g. counting backwards from 100) to block out all other thoughts

¹ Some people find that sleeping pills, alcohol, etc. can help them get to sleep quicker in the early stages. In the long run these make it more difficult to sleep and feel refreshed.

Prepare and practice a way to distract yourself at night. Some people like to keep soft music in the background (low volume), other people use relaxation (see Appendix pg10).²

Relaxation – most people are good at finding at least one or two relaxation techniques that they find calming. However, not every relaxation technique will work for you, and you may find that the ways you used to relax don't work as well anymore. Some people will benefit more from regular exercise (which is also a good for reducing stress). The following are some popular ways of relaxing:

- Taking a bath
- Watching TV/Video
- Playing sport
- Talking with a friend
- Listening to music
- Muscular relaxation
- Relaxation tape
- Reading a book
- Taking long walks
- Exercising
- Prayer/Meditation
- Deep breathing
- Positive thoughts/images

Once you know how you want to relax:

- Make sure that you get enough time to relax during each day or week;
- Practice your technique so that you get the full benefit;
- Have at least one way of calming down quickly (e.g. deep breathing).

It is a good idea to learn at least one formal relaxation method such as controlled breathing, positive imagery, or progressive muscular relaxation.

² For more information on dealing with intrusive thoughts or images, see "Dealing with Intrusions" also available in this series



Guidelines

Take a flexible approach – your needs and emotions change as you work through the changes in your life. Be flexible and creative in helping yourself.

- What works for one person may not work for another
- What works at one time may not work later on
- Men and women are likely to have different coping methods
- Be prepared to try different approaches

Develop a bedtime routine – a bedtime routine is useful for letting your body know it should get ready for sleep. Preparing for sleep can start either much earlier than bedtime (e.g. avoid caffeine, nicotine, or alcohol 4-6 hours before sleep) or five minutes beforehand (e.g. drinking warm milk) depending on your needs. If you have high levels of muscle tension or stress take at least a half an hour to unwind before going to bed (e.g. take a warm shower/bath, listen to music).

Staying in bed when you cannot sleep can make things worse. If you cannot sleep after you've gone to bed, get up and keep yourself occupied. Do something relaxing that doesn't make you more alert. Avoid eating, turning on bright lights, and listening to loud or exciting TV/music. Once you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

- Identify your favourite ways of relaxing at night
- Avoid doing things that make you more alert (drinking tea/coffee, clock-watching, computer games)
- Get up and do something relaxing if you cannot sleep (make warm milk, listen to low music)
- Try not to nap or lie in bed during the day
- Getting restful relaxation is almost as good as sleep, so try not to worry about it if you stay awake.

Distract yourself – if you can't sleep because you are thinking about what happened, do something to keep your mind occupied. Try low level music, relaxation exercises, or some other pleasant, calming activity.

- Try different distractions until you find one that works well for you
- Practice using your favourite distraction

- Use relaxation at night or exercise during the day to reduce stress³

Make time to think about what happened – set some time aside every day or week to think about what happened. Do this during the day and give yourself time afterwards to relax. You may want to spend this time in private, with a friend, or with a therapist/counsellor. Many people use this time to create a diary or scrap book to help work through their feelings and concerns.

- Make time for reflection in your daily or weekly routine
- Plan what has to be done in this time (e.g. thinking, writing)
- Allow time afterwards for relaxation

Practice relaxation – relaxation is the quickest way to prepare for sleep. You can practice it alone or with a partner or friend, preferably in a quiet place that you find peaceful. Spend at least ten to twenty minutes a day practicing relaxation until you feel comfortable doing it. Keep practicing even after you understand the basics, as your body will learn to relax quicker and quicker. There are three relaxation methods given at the back of this leaflet that are suitable for most people.

- Choose your favourite method of relaxation and practice it regularly
- Make time during your day to practice (not just at bedtime)
- Try using more than one technique (e.g. muscular relaxation and then controlled breathing)
- Decide whether to guide your own relaxation or to have instructions played from a tape or read out by a friend.
- Involve a friend or family member to help you

³ *If you have difficulty with intrusive thoughts see the self-help guidelines on dealing with intrusions*



The future

Most people will have some sleep disturbance following a sudden death. Sleep usually returns to normal after a time.

If sleep disturbance affects your work, education, family, health, etc you may want to carry out some of the suggestions included in this booklet to help you get back to your normal routine.

People whose sleep does not return to normal should consult their GP for further information on sleep disturbance or help with related difficulties (such as anxiety or intrusions).

Sleep disturbances relating to a sudden bereavement can appear immediately or after a number of years. Be prepared for sleeping habits to change in the future in response to further life changes, anniversaries, or other reminders, and refer back to the guidelines for advice.

Appendix: Relaxation techniques

Deep breathing

One of the main reasons many of us are tense is our breathing. Most people breathe very shallowly, using only the top part of their lungs. Deep breathing allows you to use your entire lungs, providing more oxygen to your body. It is probably the most effective and beneficial method of relaxation around.

1. Lie on your back or sit in a relaxed position.
2. Slowly relax your body, starting with your feet and moving through every part of your body until you have reached – and relaxed – your face and head.
3. Check over your body to see if there are any remaining areas of tension. If so, relax them.
4. Slowly breathe in:
 - (a) first fill the very bottom of your stomach
 - (b) then your entire stomach area
 - (c) then your chest
 - (d) and finally the top of your lungs almost up to your shoulders
5. Hold for a second or two, and then begin to exhale. Empty the very bottom of your lungs first, then the middle, then finally the top.

Continue this breathing for 4 or 5 minutes. Don't force your breathing; it's not a contest to see how much air you can take in. Just do it in a relaxed, peaceful manner. Deep breathing is the basis of a lot of relaxation techniques, and once mastered, can be used with either progressive muscular relaxation or guided imagery to help further relaxation.



Progressive muscular relaxation

One of the most common reactions to stress is muscle tension. Deep muscle relaxation helps to relax your entire body from head to toe by first tensing, then relaxing various muscle groups. The whole process takes about 15 minutes and can be done almost anywhere.

1. Sit or lie down and close your eyes.
2. Tense the muscles in your hands by making a tight fist.
3. Hold for 5 seconds
4. Relax your fist and feel the difference between tension and relaxation in these muscles.
5. Move on to the forearms and upper arms (both sides separately), then feet, calves, thighs, buttocks, belly, lower back, chest, shoulders, neck, and face (e.g. jaw and forehead).

By the time you have focused on all the areas of your body, your muscle tension will have drained away and you'll feel relaxed. Use deep breathing or other relaxation technique to maintain this state.

Visualise somewhere peaceful

Lie in bed with your eyes closed and imagine you are in your favourite, most peaceful place. It may be on a beach, a hilltop, a garden, or somewhere you feel peaceful. It does not have to be a real place, as long as you can picture it in your mind.

Imagine you are there now. You can see your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the fragrance of the flowers, and feel the warmth of the sun or whatever sensations are there. Just relax and enjoy it - and drift off to sleep.

Once you've found a place that's especially peaceful and effective, you'll find that the more you use it, the more you can count on it to help you relax and get to sleep. Its comfort and familiarity will make it more and more effective.

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