

## FACTSHEET 1 - SLEEPING WELL

Disturbed sleeping patterns or poor sleep often affect people taking or withdrawing from Benzos. In their 'sleeping well' leaflet, the Royal College of Psychiatrists tells us that people have used sleeping tablets for many years, but we now know that:



- they are addictive. The longer you take sleeping tablets, the more likely you are to become dependent on them
- they lose their effect quite quickly, so you have to take more and more to get the same effect
- they don't work for very long and
- they make you tired and irritable the next day

Sometimes you don't need to think very much about sleep. It's an ordinary part of life, but occasionally you just can't sleep properly. Sometimes you will hear the phrase '**Sleep Hygiene**'.

This is the controlling of "*all behavioural and environmental factors that may interfere with sleep*" so in other words, ANYTHING which might cause you not to sleep well. Trouble sleeping and daytime sleepiness can be indications of poor sleep hygiene or sleep habits. Doctors and health professionals who advise sleep hygiene strategies for patients and families have lists of suggestions which may include advice about timing of sleep and food intake in relationship to it, exercise, sleeping environment, etc

### What difference does it make what you eat, drink or do?

#### Food and drink

A lot of what you eat and drink can make a difference to your sleep. For example:-

- Caffeine hangs around in your body for many hours after your last drink of tea or coffee. There are now many fizzy drinks, and even mints, that contain a lot of caffeine. Stop drinking tea or coffee by mid-afternoon. If you want a hot drink in the evening, try something milky or herbal (but check there's no caffeine in it).
- Don't drink a lot of alcohol. It may help you fall asleep, but you will almost certainly wake up during the night.
- Don't eat or drink a lot late at night. Try to have your supper early in the evening rather than late.

#### Are there foods and drinks which might help you sleep?

- **Tryptophan** is a sleep-promoting substance which is in lots of food and drink, including **milk**. Other tryptophan-containing foods include **poultry, bananas, oats** and **honey**. **Hummus** (as well as **chickpeas**) is a great source of tryptophan.
- **Carbohydrates** - A few perfect late night snacks to get you snoozing might include a bowl of **cereal** and **milk, yoghurt, crackers**, or **bread** and cheese (people DO say cheese will give you nightmares ... but we're not sure about that!)
- **Rice** - White rice (in particular jasmine rice) has a high GI content. GI (Glycemic Index) is a measurement carried out on carbohydrate-containing foods and their impact on our blood sugar. Eating high GI foods might reduce the time it takes you to fall asleep.
- **Kale** - Kale is not only good for your health and diet, but might help you get your beauty sleep. Loaded with calcium, green leafy vegetables help the brain use tryptophan

#### And what foods and drinks might prevent you from sleeping?

- **Caffeine** is a stimulant which can stay in our system for many hours. Drinks high in caffeine make it harder to fall asleep and can result in more time in the lighter stages of sleep, with less deep sleep.
- Eating a large, heavy meal too close to bedtime may also interfere with sleep. Spicy or fatty foods can cause heartburn, which leads to difficulty in falling asleep and discomfort throughout the night.
- Foods containing a chemical called Tyramine (examples include bacon, nuts and red wine) can keep us awake at night. Tyramine causes the release of a brain stimulant.

## Lifestyle

- **Exercise regularly if you can.** Moderate exercise on a regular basis, such as swimming or walking, can help to relieve some of the tension built up over the day. But don't do vigorous exercise too close to bedtime as it may keep you awake.
- **Don't smoke.** It's bad for sleep. Smokers can take longer to fall asleep, they wake up more frequently, and they often have a more disrupted sleep
- **Try to relax before going to bed – in whichever way suits you.** Some people like a warm bath, others like to read – but some people like to watch TV. Everyone is different.

## Sleeping environment

- **Create a sleeping environment that suits you.** Temperature, lighting and noise should be tailored to YOUR needs. Some people like a pitch dark, silent room – others like a bedside light and the radio on. Think about experimentation to find out what you like. One of our staff has the TV on so it can barely be heard, on a timer, and is always asleep by the time it turns itself off!
- **Make sure that your bed is comfortable.** Some people like a mattress that's soft, some like them firm. If you think your bed is uncomfortable, have a little trial run in a bed shop and see what you might like! Equally some people like to spread out on a double bed and others can sleep quite happily in a single.
- **Keep regular hours.** Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day is probably a good idea. It should 'programme' your body to sleep better. Choose a time when you're most likely to feel sleepy and remember not everyone will want or need the same amount of sleep. Some people need 7-8 hours a night, or more – others can function well on 5-6 hours. Everyone is different.
- **Screen use.** Exposure to artificial light during the evening can disrupt our natural 24-hour body clock or "circadian rhythm" by making our brain think it's still daytime and that we shouldn't be asleep. Checking emails, using our mobiles or watching television at night when we might normally be sleeping can disturb our bodies even more because the blue light used in television, computer and tablet screens is even more disruptive to sleep than traditional lighting.

## Apart from these, are there other things that can help?

### Relaxation

Relaxation is beneficial for everyone, and can also be helpful for those struggling with sleep. Practicing relaxation techniques before bed is a great way to wind down, calm the mind, and prepare for sleep. Some simple relaxation techniques include:

- **Deep breathing.** Close your eyes, and try taking deep, slow breaths, making each breath even deeper than the last. You can find this in more detail in another of our factsheets.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** Starting with your toes, tense all the muscles as tightly as you can, then completely relax. Work your way up from your feet to the top of your head.
- **Visualizing a peaceful, restful place.** Close your eyes and imagine a place or activity that is calming and peaceful for you. Concentrate on how relaxed this place or activity makes you feel.

### Technology

- **Smartphone/tablet/iPad apps\***

Some people find the sound of rain or the ocean restful. You can download various apps for smartphones/tablets/iPhones which will play sounds on a loop before, and during your sleep. One of BATs staff sleeps to the sound of rain and distant thunderstorms!

- **PC/MAC Software\*\***

During the day, computer screens are designed to look like the sun. But, at 9 pm, 10 pm, or 3 am, you possibly shouldn't be looking at the sun. It's even possible that you're staying up too late because of your computer. There are apps which will dim your screen and change the colour as night falls, reducing the emissions from your screen – so if you must use your laptop when it's dark it will get progressively dimmer as daylight fades.

\* Lightning bug - <http://lightningbug.me/>

\*\* f.lux - <https://justgetflux.com/>

## FACTSHEET 2 –MAKING YOUR LIFE EASIER

If you are taking or withdrawing from Benzos, things can be very difficult. You might find or be given, lots and lots of advice – from professionals, friends and family. And not all of it will be useful or accurate – so it can be very confusing.



Chronic benzodiazepine usage can cause both depression, and dulling or flattening of the emotions. On the other hand, some individuals experience euphoria.

Tolerance is quickly reached with Benzos. This means your body has got used to the dose and it is no longer having its full strength therapeutic actions. Many people start to experience withdrawal symptoms while still taking the drugs. **It is real** not imagined - you can be in withdrawal while still using your Benzos. This is because of tolerance and made worse if using short acting Benzos such as oxazepam, triazolam, temazepam, and ativan.

### I'M GETTING SOME REALLY ODD FEELINGS. IS THIS 'NORMAL'?

There are many things you might feel during stabilisation and withdrawal – and ways you can help yourself.

- **FEAR:** Feeling frightened is one of the most common effects during tolerance and withdrawal of Benzos. Learning to acknowledge and talk about your fears/feelings and thoughts can help. You can write some fears down using a daily diary – seeing things written down can help separate the real from the unreal.
- **ANXIETY:** Anxiety can be related to fear. Imagined or real, we all feel anxious at times. In tolerance and withdrawal it can be magnified and create panic. Try to relax and put it on paper and into perspective.
- **ANGER:** You may use anger as a protection mechanism to stay safe and keep people away. This is not the type of anger we are talking about. In withdrawal people have been known to go into a rage for simple things and fly of the handle. This happens when you are unable to express yourself and your anxiety (which was once controlled by Benzos) can now easily go out of control.
- **MISINTERPRETATION:** You may pick things up and may interpret them wrongly. This is common; you may think someone has said something totally different. If you have a close friend talk to them, check things out.
- **PARANOIA:** Another common symptom. You may get paranoid and edgy, and make an error of judgement about a look from someone or a sound you hear. Withdrawal tends to illuminate things and can play tricks with your mind. This will pass. Try to remember times when you never felt this way.
- **DE-REALISATION:** feeling that things aren't real
- **DE-PERSONALISATION:** feeling detached from your body, or feeling that your body is not real

### Physically things can be pretty odd, too...

Benzos can also have negative and sometimes disastrous side effects and consequences. This can become more difficult by not knowing about or recognising certain withdrawal symptoms. Sometimes people are unable or unwilling to share these symptoms with a key worker or other health professional. And sometimes people simply don't know what these feelings are. You might notice:-

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • Sleepiness or sleeplessness                          | • Numbness  |
| • Enhanced sensitivity to sound, light, taste or smell | • General aches and pains (muscle tension)                            |
| • Giddiness and sense of movement                      | • Weakness in arms and legs (Jelly legs)                              |
| • Blurred vision                                       | • Muscle twitching  |
| • Tinnitus   | • Stomach and bowel problems, irritable bowel syndrome, hiatus hernia |
| • Tingling or burning sensations                       | • Influenza-like symptoms   |

- Jaw pains, toothache
- Feeling too hot / too cold, sometimes in rapid succession
- Palpitations
- Headaches
- Rashes

### SO HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

It sounds like a bit of a cliché – but be kind to yourself. Try to identify the things that you find hardest, and think of a way to make them easier. Things you find hard might be easy for someone else who is on Benzos – and vice versa. It's different for everyone.

**For example** – planning ahead is very difficult for a lot of people taking or withdrawing from Benzos. So let's say you're meeting a friend for a coffee. If you're planning two weeks ahead to meet at 2 o'clock at a certain place, all the pressure of trying to remember where / when / who can be a bit overwhelming. Why not say to your friend that it'll probably be within a couple of weeks, and can you give them a call when you feel well enough to go, and will it be OK if it's at short notice?

### STRATEGIES YOU CAN TRY

Many of these things will not come naturally to you – or many other people! Benzo withdrawal is a long process if done properly – but stick with it and you will succeed. You may need to learn how to be more patient than you have been in the past – but don't expect this to happen all at once. It's like learning a completely new skill.

If things aren't going how you'd planned, or you don't feel as well as you wanted to - don't be too hard on yourself. Tell yourself that you will just manage for another hour. Then another hour. Then until the evening – then until the next day. Little by little. And eventually a week will have gone by – a month, a year. Try to think of 'now' and not too far ahead.

- Be patient, don't rush.
- Try not to dwell too much in what you have lost or should have had. Stay in the present with focus on your recovery.
- Don't be afraid to try new things. Little things – like a food you've never tried before; or talking to someone you know but have never spoken to. It doesn't have to be a deep, meaningful conversation – just say 'hello'!
- Set **realistic** goals for yourself, where you want to go, work, family, college etc. Don't overstretch yourself as you may be disappointed – which will bring you down.
- Many people find they don't like certain things about their family friends as they seem to have changed. It's you who has changed.
- Stay connected to your support network.
- If you have mixed with other users, as you continue down the recovery road you may find that you don't see as much of them as you used to – you might meet new people and build new relationships.

### AND WHAT ABOUT HELPING OTHER PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW I FEEL?

BAT can help you with this. You can show them this factsheet too! Information and knowledge are your most valuable tools when explaining things to people. Carers / friends / family often think you should 'be over it by now'. They probably don't know much about Benzos and will make assumptions about how you should be doing. Benzo addiction and recovery is hard for people to understand, mainly because it is a long process.

**AND REMEMBER ...**Time is a healer and there is life after Benzos!

## FACTSHEET 3 - EATING WELL

### Nutrition and wellbeing

There are many things you can do to help yourself. Diet is a key controllable factor inter-related with other lifestyle factors that impact on mental health outcomes. It is important to give your body a varied range of nutrients which may help as you recover.



Poor nutrition is associated with having many adverse effects. Low intakes of B vitamins, dietary antioxidants, carbohydrate and N3 polyunsaturated fatty acids are associated with poorer mental health or depression. A shortage of the amino acid called tryptophan (necessary for serotonin production) has been shown to result in lowering of mood. High carbohydrate intake increases serotonin production (which elevates mood), possibly by increasing the rate tryptophan which enters the brain.

### KEY NUTRIENTS AND SOME OF THE FOODS WHERE THEY ARE FOUND:

#### TRYPTOPHAN:

Necessary for production of serotonin, the body's natural 'feel good' factor. Tryptophan is found in bananas, pineapples, turkey, plums and milk

#### B VITAMINS:

Necessary for transport of energy and the body's spark plug. Without B adequate vitamins you may not be getting the benefit of other nutrients or utilising energy for food as efficiently. B vitamins can be found in food such as, whole grain cereals, beans, seeds, nut, milk, dairy products, eggs, dark green leafy vegetables, fish and meat especially liver.

#### ANTIOXIDANTS:

Help slow the ageing process by eliminating free radicals from our blood stream as well as lowering of heart disease and some cancers. They are found in tomatoes, broccoli, sweet potatoes, citrus fruits, lime peaches, nuts, seeds, strawberries, shellfish, chicken, vegetable oil, liver oil, eggs, grains, pomegranate, grapes, flax seed, tea, red wine.

#### OMEGA 3/6 FATTY ACIDS:

Help reduce cholesterol, improve the immune system, support joints and helps in maintaining a healthy heart and can be found in, eggs, walnuts, brazil nuts, almonds, seeds, oil rich fish such as sardines, pilchards, salmon, trout, herring, mackerel and fresh (not canned) tuna and dark green leafy vegetables, (broccoli, spinach).

#### FOOD RICH IN CALCIUM:

Helps with healthy bone formation and as the body's calcium banks start to lower from mid-thirties a diet rich in calcium alongside weight bearing exercise such as running, tennis, badminton etc. helps to maintain strong bones. Calcium is found in skimmed/semi skimmed milk, cottage cheese/cheese, yogurt, fromage frais, sardines (canned in oil), onions, watercress, rhubarb, salmon, wholemeal bread, vegetables.

### CARBOHYDRATES WHICH KEEP YOU FULLER FOR LONGER, AND SLOWLY RELEASE ENERGY:

#### BREAD & STARCHES:

Boiled spaghetti, brown rice, white long grain rice, sweet potatoes, new potatoes, wholegrain bread, oats & raisins, soya & linseed.

#### CEREAL:

All bran, natural muesli, oatmeal, weetabix and shredded wheat.

#### FRUIT:

Banana, apple, grapes, grapefruit, cherries, plums, orange, kiwi.

**VEGETABLES & LEGUMES:**

Raw carrots, aubergine, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, mushrooms, onions, sweet corn, lima beans, frozen green peas, red peppers, baked beans, butter beans, black, boiled kidney, green lentils, red lentils, boiled soy.

**SNACKS:**

Snickers bar, oatmeal cookies.

**OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION**

- Slow releasing carbohydrate diets help people lose and control weight
- Slow releasing carbs improve diabetes control
- Slow releasing carbs reduce the risk of heart disease
- Slow releasing carbs reduce hunger and keep you fuller for longer
- Slow releasing carbs prolong physical endurance
- Use breakfast cereals based on oats, barley and bran
- Use breads with wholegrain, stone-ground flour, sour dough
- Enjoy all other types of fruit and vegetables
- Use Basmati or Doongara rice , pasta, noodles, quinoa

**Eating a balanced diet consisting of a mixture of these foods will help you and your body deal with your recovery and possibly help you feel better a lot quicker.**

**Also ...**

- Exercise such as Tai chi, yoga, meditation, and light cardiovascular and water exercises. Practicing relaxation through breathing and mindfulness also helps in benzodiazepine withdrawal.
- Remember making small changes is more successful in the long term as it is manageable and easier to sustain.

**QUICK AND EASY NUTRITIOUS SNACKS AND MENU IDEAS**

**Breakfasts**

- CEREAL: All bran, natural muesli, oatmeal, weetabix and shredded wheat with milk. Fruit juice.
- Scrambled eggs with wholemeal toast and tea with milk.

**Light lunches**

- Wholemeal bread chicken or salmon sandwich. Yoghurt, banana
- Mixed bean salad with chicken
- Jacket or sweet potato with grated cheese

**Dinner**

- Vegetable stir fry with (or without!) chicken
- Chilli made with kidney beans and any kind of rice

**Snacks**

- Oatmeal cookies and a glass of milk
- Small bar of chocolate
- Nuts and raisins

**BUT ABOVE ALL ...**

- Treat yourself now and then! A balanced diet means exactly that – a little bit of everything. The OCCASIONAL takeaway or bar of chocolate really won't hurt ... occasionally means once every week or fortnight though, not every day!
- Try to keep regular mealtimes (breakfast is particularly important)
- DRINK plenty (not alcohol) but not too many caffeinated drinks like coffee (and tea to some extent) and coke etc. Energy drinks (Red Bull, Monster, Relentless) aren't ideal as they are packed with caffeine.

## FACTSHEET 4 - RELAXATION

You will often hear people talk about 'relaxation' exercises. But what ARE they, and how do you do them? Muscular relaxation exercises and deep breathing are two common techniques to help people to relax and combat symptoms of anxiety. They may also help to ease symptoms of depression. Some people relax with sport, exercise, listening to music, watching TV, reading a book, etc. However, some people find it helpful to follow specific relaxation exercises.

### PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION EXERCISE



This relaxation technique takes about 15-20 minutes to complete, and can be practised either in a comfortable chair, in bed, on the floor, or anywhere that feels right (horizontal is best).

It is preferable to find a relatively quiet environment, though sometimes we must work through great adversity; loosening or removing clothing and shoes are also conducive to successful relaxation.

Use the same pattern of breathing throughout the sequence, taking time to relax and reflect on the inner rhythms of the heart and breath, after one has exhaled and relaxed the muscle. Take it slowly, giving time for the registering of enjoyment in the body/mind. Inhale deeply as you tense each group to a slow count of 6. Begin with this inhalation. And as you exhale, purse the lips and slowly blow the air out letting the feet fall open and relax. Wait 30 seconds before beginning.

Make sure that your shoulders are open behind you, your spine in line and hips balanced into the floor. Close your eyes. All exercises to be done three times. Focus on each group of muscles as we work our way through them. Remind the client to follow their natural flow of breath, their heart-beat, and let the tension flow out like water, leaving them feeling relaxed. It is better to close the eyes.

- Take a deep breath in and point your toes - hold for a count of six and exhale letting out any tensions, let your feet open and relax.
- Take a deep breath in and flex your feet up pressing the calf muscles into the floor - hold for six and exhale - release the legs.
- Take a deep breath and pull up the muscles above the kneecap into the thighs and hold and release muscles and breath and let your thighs roll open. Concentrate on that area.
- Take a deep breath in and squeeze your behind and abdomen tightly in and exhale - release into the floor, dissolve into the surface.
- Take a deep breath into the abdomen - let it balloon out - hold - draw it in - be mindful of that area, exhale - relax and allow your breath to regulate itself for a few moments.
- Bend your elbows and make fists - breath in and squeeze the deltoid muscles - the top of your arms, and exhale relaxing the arms to the floor.
- Take a breath in and stretch your arms out and span your fingers – exhale and release your arms.
- Take a breath in and raise your shoulders to the ears holding for the six count and exhale relaxing your shoulders. Let the tension flow out with the breath.
- As you breathe in - bring your palms together in front of the chest and press them against each other - hold and then relax your arms to the floor.
- Breathe in and expand the lungs and upper chest, - hold - listen to the beat and pulse - be aware. Exhale - relax and let the tension float out like bubbles in water.
- Breathe in and raise your head from the floor and hold - gently let it return to the floor as you exhale and let it relax into the floor like a sponge. After a few minutes, slowly roll the head from side to side a few times, and then relax again.

- Take a breath in and raise the eyebrows - feel the pull behind the eyes. Exhale and relax. This relaxes the frontal lobe of the brain.
- Breathe in and squeeze your face tight - hold - and relax. Feel the light pouring into it - and the heat radiating out.
- Breathe in and open your jaw wide - stretching down through the jaw and cheekbones - hold - and as you exhale – say 'AHHhrhh' - and relax your mouth. Be aware of your heartbeat and inner rhythm - let the breath regulate itself - be aware of the sensations on the body - be aware of the peace and release of tension - feel lightness - smile inwardly all the way down to your toes.
- Take a deep breath into the chest and hold - release just half of it – now breathe into the abdomen and hold - imagine that you have a fountain pouring out the crown of your head as you exhale - above you and around you. Smile inside - relax and enjoy.

## MINDFULNESS

You might have heard people talk about something called 'Mindfulness'. What is it? Mindfulness is a state of mind in which you become focused on the here and now, and not on what may happen in the future or what has happened in the past. It is about living in and appreciating each moment and this is done by using your senses and allowing your mind to be aware of this moment without judgement or analysis.

Here are two examples of what this means;

- As simple a chore as washing up – instead of simply going through the motions of washing up, notice the feeling and sensations of the water, the bubbles, and the items you wash. Think about how you wash each item; use all your senses to experience this moment as vividly as possible.
- Eating a grape – look at the colour and shape of the grape, can you smell it, place it in your mouth and feel the texture, is it sweet or bitter, is it soft or firm, is it juicy or dry. Savour this experience and focus fully on it – do not think about the next grape you will eat or the last one you have eaten. Focus purely on this moment.

## Mindfulness exercise

Some people may find the above examples hard to begin with as it is very easy to find your mind wandering, giving you anxieties and unhelpful thoughts. So here is an exercise to assist in stilling the mind (The Monkey Mind) and freeing it from these constant thoughts.

- Sit comfortably where you will not be disturbed and close your eyes.
- Bring your attention to your breathing, notice the in breath and out breath without affecting your breathing rhythm.
- Now become aware of your thoughts, notice them without judgement and analysis. Just notice how they come and go and how chaotic these thoughts are.
- Continue to focus on the breathing and relax more, if you feel yourself being drawn into your thoughts then just acknowledge them and let them drift by.

Whenever you carry out this exercise try to persevere for at least five minutes and you will find the more you do it then the intrusive thoughts will become less and less.

## What is Mindfulness good for?

Mindfulness is an effective way of improving the quality of your life by helping with issues of stress, reducing pain, decreasing addictive cravings, hot flushes, reducing relapses of depression and enhancing your emotional intelligence.

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