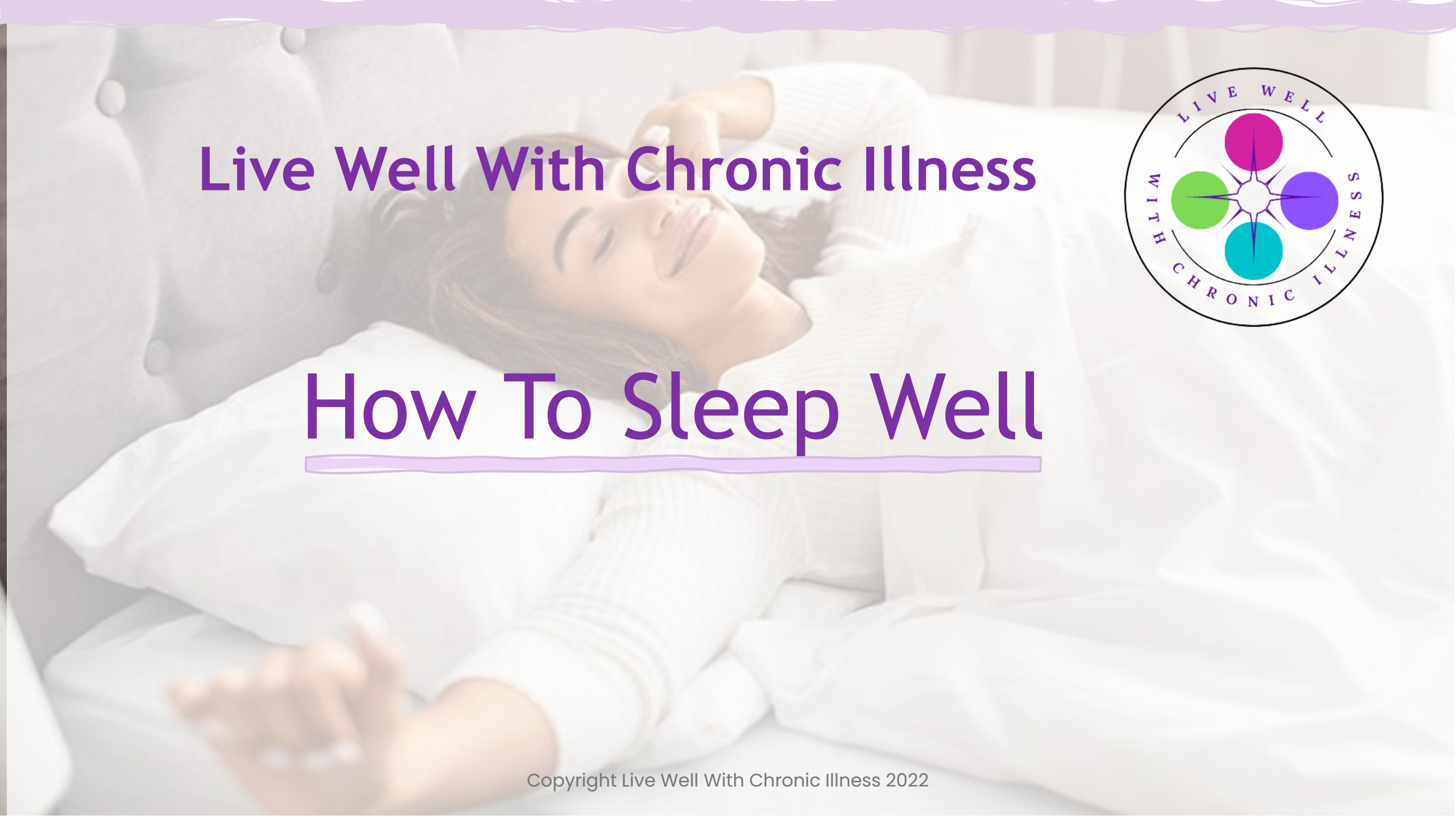


Live Well With Chronic Illness

How To Sleep Well

Deborah Bircham

Health Coach, Mindfulness Teacher

Holistic and Naturopathic Wellness

QUALIFICATIONS:

- ✓ Naturopathic Nutrition and Health Coaching: *Diploma-College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM)*
- ✓ Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy: *Mindworks*
- ✓ Mindfulness Teacher: *Teach 10 Institute*

MEMBERSHIPS:

- ✓ National Council for Integrative Psychotherapists (NCIP)
- ✓ UK & International Health Coaching Association(UKIHCA)
- ✓ The Association of Naturopathic Practitioners (ANP)

Socials: Live Well With Chronic Illness
Email: livewellwithchronicillness@outlook.com
Website: https://livewellwithchronicillness.co.uk

Specialises in Lyme Disease, MCAS, Dysautonomia and Chronic Pain

What We Will Cover

- What is sleep?
- Why is sleep so important for health?
- What things can prevent us from sleeping well?
- How can we improve our sleep?

Part 1:
What is Sleep?

Introduction

Sleep is far more than just a time to rest. It's a complex, active process that plays a critical role in restoring our bodies and minds.

Getting enough quality sleep is as important to our overall well-being as eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly.

What is Optimal Sleep?

7-9 hours per night is considered optimal

Less than 7 hours is considered poor sleep

The amount of sleep we need varies with age and individual health.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends:

- **Over 65s** around 7 hours on average
- **Adults**: 7-9 hours
- **Teens**: 8-10 hours
- **Children**: 9-12 hours
- **Babies:** 14-17 hours

Timing of Sleep

- Broken sleep is detrimental to health.
- Timing of sleep also impacts health – before midnight is better for brain detox.
- Delta sleep (deep sleep) happens for longer earlier in the night 10-12, and REM sleep happens more later in the night.
- Some studies suggest 10pm is the optimal time to go to bed.

How Do We Sleep?

When we sleep, we don't simply drift off and wake up hours later. Instead, we go through distinct **sleep cycles** that repeat throughout the night. Each cycle lasts around 90 minutes and consists of several stages, with each playing a unique role:

- **Stage 1 – Light Sleep**
  This is the transition phase between wakefulness and sleep, lasting a few minutes. The body starts to relax, and our brain waves slow down, preparing us for deeper sleep.
- **Stage 2 – Deeper Light Sleep**
  During this stage, heart rate and breathing slow further, and body temperature drops. This stage makes up about 50% of our total sleep.
- **Stage 3 – Deep Sleep (Delta)**
  Also known as slow-wave sleep, this is the most restorative phase. Here, the body does the most repair work, building bone and muscle and boosting the immune system. Deep sleep is critical for physical recovery and growth.
- **REM Sleep (Rapid Eye Movement)**
  In this stage, brain activity picks up, and most dreams occur. REM sleep supports learning, memory consolidation, and mood regulation. Lack of REM sleep can affect cognitive functions like problem-solving, creativity, and emotional stability.

The Sleep Cycle – A Repeating Process

4-6 x 90 minute cycles per night.

The length of each stage shifts
More Delta sleep 10-2am
More REM stages after 2am

This cycling helps the body balance physical recovery with cognitive and emotional processing.

Time your bedtime to ensure you have time for between 4 and 6 of these 90 minute cycles before you wake up again.

If we are woken suddenly in the middle of a cycle, we can feel groggy and unwell.

Part 2:
Why Sleep matters?

Effects of Poor Sleep on Health

Inadequate or poor-quality sleep disrupts these cycles and, over time, can have a profound impact on our health:

Cognitive Impairment – Lack of sleep affects focus, memory, and decision-making.

Mood and Mental Health – Chronic sleep deprivation has been linked to depression, anxiety, and irritability.

Physical Health Risks – Studies show that sleep loss contributes to high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, weight gain, and lowered immune response.

Let's look at some of these in more detail.....

Effects of Poor Sleep on Health

- **Obesity.** Research shows that less than 7 hours sleep is associated with obesity. (affects Ghrelin and Leptin, hunger/satiety, also cortisol)
- **Diabetes.** Research shows poor sleep affects insulin and impacts Type 2 diabetes
- **Heart Health** Lack of sleep increases inflammation and artery damage and high blood pressure
- **Pain** – poor sleep affects pain perception and inflammation. Also disrupts sleep – bidirectional.
- **Fatigue** - essential for cellular repair and energy restoration
- **Immunity** – reduces immune cell production, reduces antibody production after vaccines, increases inflammation. More likely to catch colds.

Sleep and Brain Health

Poor sleep affects the brain in many ways:

- **Memory and Learning**: Sleep plays a critical role in consolidating memories and processing new information. Poor sleep makes us forgetful.
- **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making**: Poor sleep affects the brain's prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for reasoning and decision-making. This makes us more likely to make mistakes.
- **Creativity**: Good sleep enhances the brain's ability to think creatively and solve problems innovatively. Lack of sleep stops us from doing this.
- **Brain Cleaning**. Delta sleep phases allow Glymphatic Drainage – where the brain cleans itself every night. Lack of delta sleep can lead to build-up of toxins and waste products, affecting brain function and health.

Sleep and Mental Health

Poor sleep is closely linked to depression and poor mental health, creating a bidirectional relationship where each condition exacerbates the other.

1. **Disrupts Mood Regulation.** Disrupts our ability to process emotional experiences and regulate stress
2. **Neurotransmitter Imbalances.** Affects the balance of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine.
3. **Depression.** Sleep disturbance linked to depression. Lack of Serotonin.
4. **Anxiety.** Sleep deprivation intensifies the brain's response to stress and threat-related stimuli, making individuals more prone to anxiety disorders.
5. **Joy and Motivation**. Lowers our ability to respond to positive things and feel happy.

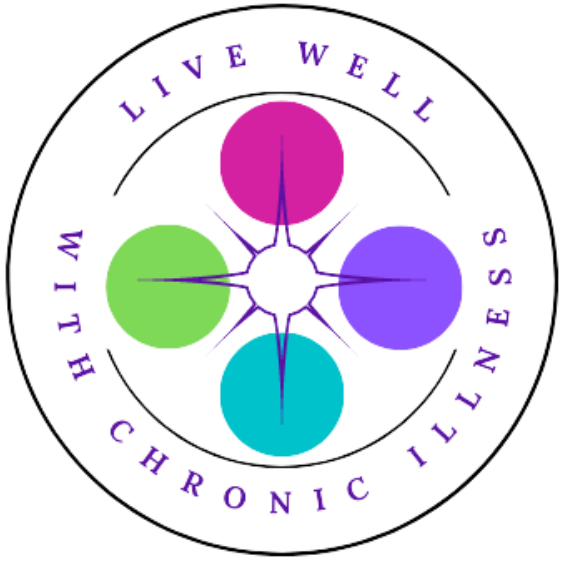
Part 3: What Stops us Sleeping?

What Stops us Sleeping?

- Stress – high cortisol
- Anxiety
- Pain
- Blue light exposure
- Erratic Blood Sugar
- Eating too late/digestive activity
- Light in the bedroom (affects melatonin levels)
- Muscle tension
- Lack of exercise

What Stops us Sleeping? - continued

- Dietary deficiencies – One large study found a lack of key nutrients, such as calcium, magnesium, and vitamins A, C, D, E, and K to be associated with sleep problems.
- Stimulants – spices, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine
- Neurotransmitter imbalance – GABA and L 'Theanine, Histamine, Serotonin
- Overstimulation – taxing work, exciting films, horror films



Part 4:
How to Improve Sleep

Sleep Hygiene

Maintain a Consistent routine

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends.
- This helps regulate your body's internal clock, improving sleep quality.

Create a Relaxing Bedtime Routine

- Engage in calming activities like reading, meditation, or gentle stretching.
- Avoid stimulating activities (e.g., watching TV, using electronics) before bed.

Optimize Your Sleep Environment

- Keep your bedroom cool, quiet, and dark.
- Use blackout curtains, earplugs, or a white noise machine if necessary.

Limit Screen Time Before Bed

- The blue light from phones, tablets, and computers can disrupt melatonin production.
- Aim to stop using electronic devices at least 30-60 minutes before sleep.

Sleep Hygiene

Bathing

- One study showed a hot bath 90 mins before bed improved amount of deep sleep.

Epsom Salt Bath

- Epsom Salts contain magnesium, which relaxes our muscles and our nervous system and promotes sleep.

Exercise during the day to promote tiredness

- One study found regular exercise reduced the time taken to fall asleep by 55%, and increased total sleep time by 18%
- Don’t do vigorous exercise 2-3 hours before bed (Cortisol)

Gentle Movement

- Yoga or Qigong can help promote relaxation before bed

Reset Body Clock

Get Morning Sunlight

- 15-30 minutes outdoors in natural light within an hour of waking up.
- Sunlight helps regulate melatonin production and reinforces your body's internal clock.

Consistent bedtimes and wake-times

- Regular routine allows your body clock to reset

Red light/darkness at night

- Red/orange lights in evening.
- Melatonin is only produced in complete darkness

Be Patient

- Adjusting your circadian rhythm can take several days to weeks, depending on how misaligned it is. Stick to the routine consistently.

Reduce Stress Levels

The nervous system needs to feel **safe** and relaxed at night in order for us to fall asleep.
Stress, anxiety, trauma, and certain chemicals in the body can all prevent the nervous system from being able to 'switch off'.

Activities that help our nervous system calm down are

- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Breathing Exercises
- Walking in nature
- Socialising and spending time with friends
- Pets
- Fun activities/hobbies
- 'Me Time'/Self-Care
- Counselling/therapy

Cortisol and melatonin

Melatonin suppresses production of cortisol and helps us to sleep

Cortisol suppresses melatonin and keeps us awake

Foods and Drinks that prevent sleep

- Avoid caffeine (Caffeine can stay elevated in your blood for 6–8 hours.)
- Avoid alcohol – affects chemicals in the brain that control circadian rhythm (Melatonin and Growth Hormone)
- Stablise blood sugar – complex carbs
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol close to bedtime - digestion
- Avoid being hungry – eat well during the day, complex carbs gradual blood sugar drop
- Reduce histamine. Foods that are high in histamine can interfere with sleep – cheese, alcohol, cured/aged meats, fermented foods, certain fruits and vegetables like avocado and strawberries.

Timing of Food

- We need to finish eating around 4 hours before we go to sleep
- Lying down after a meal will promote indigestion and reflux
- Digestion needs to stop at night so the body can do gut housekeeping
- Body needs to use the energy for repair and detoxing

Don’t eat a big meal directly before bed, don’t eat in the night

Eat Foods That Help Promote Sleep

- Foods containing tryptophan promote sleep – turkey, eggs, chicken, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, milk
- Foods containing magnesium – Brazil nuts, almonds, pumpkin seeds, bananas, dark chocolate, dark green leafy veg
- Foods that contain Melatonin - Tart cherries, Grapes, Pistachios, milk, bananas, nuts, oats
- Foods that increase GABA – shellfish, turkey, pork, seaweeds, tomatoes, walnuts
- Kiwi Fruit – contains serotonin and melatonin and antioxidants that help reduce inflammation
- L 'Theanine – amino acid. Green and black tea. Promotes relaxation

Bedtime Snack

- Banana
- Kiwi fruit
- Handful of almonds and Walnuts
- Oat biscuit
- Cherries
- Cup of tea

Drinks that promote sleep

- Chamomile tea
- Peppermint tea
- Valerian root tea
- Nettle tea
- Passionflower tea
- Hops
- Turmeric milk
- Tea

- Cocoa- promotes serotonin, contains magnesium and flavonoids that can promote relaxation

  However, contains caffeine and theobromine which can be stimulating for some.

These drinks have calming properties and can help prepare your body for sleep.

Summary

Good sleep is really important for our physical and mental health

There are certain foods and lifestyle habits that can prevent us from sleeping

There are lots of foods/drinks and habits that can help promote healthy sleep

What Changes Can I Make?

- What tips will I take away from today's session?
- What is the biggest factor that disrupts my sleep?
- How can I improve my sleep?
- What foods can I eat to help me sleep?

Keep In Touch!

Scan the QR Code to subscribe to my Mailing

Contacts

Website https://livewellwithchronicillness.co.uk/

Facebook https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100088138430749

Instagram https://www.instagram.com/livewellwithchronicillness/

YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@LiveWellWithChronicIllness

LinkedIn https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborah-bircham-08221866/

Email livewellwithchronicillness@outlook.com

Telephone 01780 672505