

SLEEP SENSE & STRATEGIES FOR CHRONIC PAIN

1. Create a sleep sanctuary

To get good sleep, you need a sleep sanctuary that provides a calming sensory experience that is soothing enough for you to get to sleep and stay asleep. This mostly means regulating what you see, hear and feel when you are in your sleep space.

Assess your sleep space and consider making some changes, like:

- Declutter your bedroom – in general, uncluttered environments are less stimulating for your brain and so more conducive to sleep.
- Choose a calmer colour palette – decorate in cool or neutral colours (like blues and greens) rather than bright and warm tones (like reds and yellows).
- Cut out the 'busy' patterns – highly patterned fabrics have a similar effect to clutter. So, aim for more colour blocks with soothing lines and minimalistic bedroom décor.
- Minimise light – rig your main lights with dimmer switches so that, as the sun sets and light fades, you can match that sequence. Then deepen the darkness in your bedroom with adequate window dressings and covering other light sources. If necessary, use an eye mask too.
- Keep it cool – the ideal ambient temperature for good sleep is a cool and stable 21 degrees Celsius. Easier to manage if you have air conditioning but try keep it cooler with open windows and fans if you don't.
- Buy better beds – generally, a firm (but not hard) mattress along with 100% cotton linens and sleepwear is best for a comfortable night. If you are more sensory sensitive or anxious, you might want to try a weighted blanket before sleep for its calming, constant, deep-pressure input.
- Manage noise levels – most often, silence is golden for sleep. If you need to drown out outside noises, try white (more treble) or pink (more bass) noisemakers or invest in comfortable noise-cancelling earphones.

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2. Stick to a set sleep routine

Your body and brain crave the safety that a stable and predictable daily routine brings – from regular mealtimes to set sleep and wake times and more. Constant changes to these (e.g. skipping meals sometimes or going to bed different times every night) can result in more pain and other symptoms as your systems try to adjust to the changes. Rather, stick to set wake-up and bedtimes that match the hours of sleep you used to find optimal before you developed pain and retrain yourself to sleep.

3. Practice sleep sense

Once you have decided on your set bedtime, help yourself prepare to sleep well by practicing some good sleep sense before bed.

In your *1-hour wind-down* before going to sleep:

STOP:

- Working or studying.
- Using technology to interact with others.
- Having arguments or heated discussions.
- Intense exercise or physical activity – apart from sex!
- Consuming alcohol. (Better to stop 3 hours before sleep time!)
- Eating – but do not go to bed really hungry either!
- Hydrating – this also limits toileting interfering with sleep!

And START:

- Dimming the lights in your home.
- Engaging in quiet, passive activities (e.g. watching your favourite TV show, reading).
- Having a hot bath to trigger cooling of your core temperature and sleep onset.
- Wrapping up tight in a towel, gown or blanket for calming, full-body, deep-pressure input.
- Using relaxation techniques or other mind-body strategies.
- Massaging your lower legs or applying heavy pressure/weight on them if you suffer from Restless Legs Syndrome.

Ref. Your Pain Playbook by Helen Roome

**Want comprehensive assessment and personalised support
for your chronic pain challenges?**

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