

SWEET RELEASE OF SLEEP

Professor Sarah Niblock, CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, and UKCP psychotherapist Heather Darwall-Smith discuss the importance of a good night's rest, why we may be wakeful and how therapy can help



We all sleep, yet when we have problems getting the rest we need,

we don't typically look at the psychological undertones regarding why. How do we know whether we are simply having a few bad nights or need professional support?

In the accompanying podcast, I speak to psychotherapist Heather Darwall-Smith to find out how prevalent sleep difficulties are – and when psychotherapy is best placed to help.

Sarah
CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy

Heather Darwall-Smith, who specialises in sleep, explores our inner experience of sleep in order to improve it

When it comes to sleep, our needs and how we sleep are unique. When thinking about how we sleep in times of difficulty, we must understand the importance of looking inward at our experience of sleep. For example, if you feel anxious about sleep, take longer than 30 minutes to fall asleep, wake regularly during the night or if you are experiencing excessive daytime sleepiness, it may be time to seek support.

A global increase in sleep problems has been reported during the pandemic. Our sleep has been affected due to the ongoing anxiety we feel about the unknown. We can think of sleep as the ultimate in letting go and, if we can't do that, we may struggle. Or perhaps we are sleeping, but the quality isn't great. Either way, there's no quick fix, but there are steps we can implement to help.

When a client comes to see me, there

are three levels to the initial sessions. Firstly, a screening to identify what is going on – there may be a need to refer to other services. The next step is to look at what 24 hours looks like for you. Here we consider your thoughts and cognitions about sleep and what you do to relax, among other things. Often sleep issues have deep-seated roots, which is when psychotherapeutic support is essential for exploring the reasons and options.

There is no answer to when someone might see a change. Some may find relief in a few weeks, others may take months and, for some, there are long-term issues that are trickier to alter. But a therapist can help those with ongoing difficulties find acceptance and coping mechanisms.

Our sleep needs change throughout life, as do our external environments. We can't always control our sleep, but we can work on other aspects of life to give ourselves the best chance for better rest.



Listen to the podcast

Everyone has experienced issues with sleep at some point – but how do we know when we need professional support? In this episode, UKCP's Sarah Niblock and psychotherapist Heather Darwall-Smith, a sleep specialist, discuss problems with sleep and the ways in which psychotherapy can offer assistance to someone who is struggling. Listen at psychologies.co.uk/how-get-good-nights-sleep-a-podcast-ukcp



Three tips to help you sleep tonight

If you need immediate help with your sleep, here are three pieces of advice that may offer swift relief:

1 Create the opportunity to sleep well. Time and your environment can make a big difference. Being in a cool, quiet and dark space, having a relaxed mind and body and carving out proper time to rest are important factors.

2 Don't worry about sleep. Biologically, your body will sleep, taking what it needs when it can. People often believe that you have to have a perfect night's sleep to have a good day, but that isn't true. Sleep ebbs and flows.

3 Be consistent. Getting up at the same time every day can help you find a rhythm. Getting outside into the light will reset your body clock. Stick to the rhythm of the day – the light and dark. This is nature's way of helping us prepare for rest. Combining this with a consistent routine can help you find a way out of sleeplessness.



How I became a therapist **Heather Darwall-Smith trained to be a psychotherapist after experiencing the benefits of therapy herself.**

In my 20s, I worked as an art director, but felt I wanted something else. I went to therapy for multiple reasons and experienced the profundity of feeling heard and seen without judgment.

My progression into training as a therapist evolved from a foundation year in counselling and psychotherapy to an MA

in Core Process Psychotherapy and specialisation in sleep. I continued training in sleep medicine.

I see sleep as the ultimate release – a biological necessity, but often hard to do. Bringing awareness to the parts of us that are trying to stay awake helps us let go and go to sleep.
heatherdarwallsmith.com

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About UKCP and how to find a therapist

The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) is the leading research, innovation, educational and regulatory body working to advance psychotherapy for the benefit of all. We have a register of more than 8,000 individual members who offer a range of therapy approaches for couples, individuals, families and groups.

We also have over 70 training and accrediting organisations for those who wish to become therapists. To find the right therapist for you, or learn how to become a therapist, visit psychotherapy.org.uk

