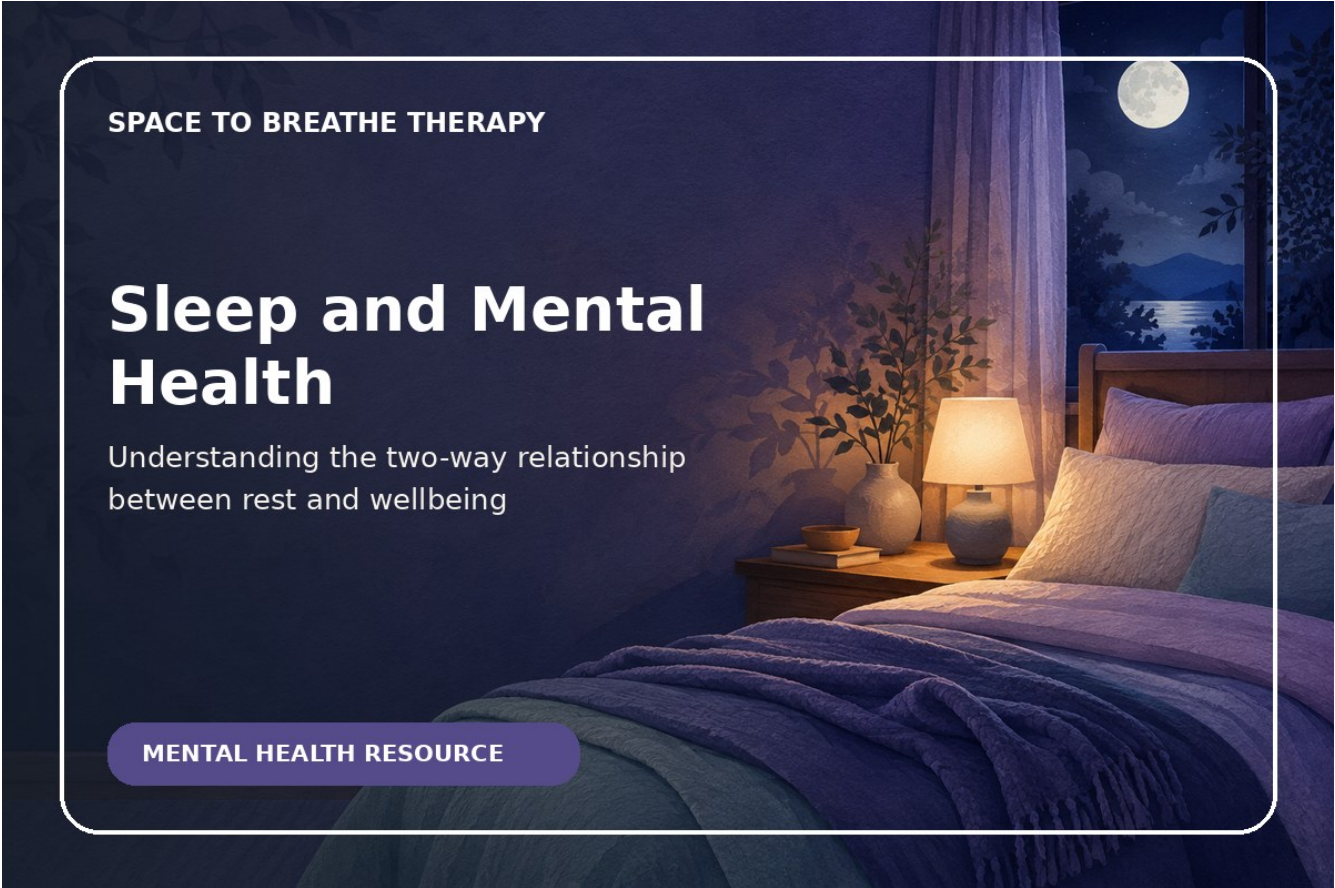




SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY

Sleep and Mental Health

Understanding the two-way relationship between rest and wellbeing

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE

Sleep and Mental Health

Sleep and mental health influence one another. Anxiety, depression, trauma, pain, hormones and neurodivergence can affect falling asleep, staying asleep and waking. Poor sleep can then increase emotional sensitivity, irritability and difficulty concentrating. Sleep problems are not always caused by bad habits, and trying harder to sleep can make the nervous system more alert.

Rest is not a performance. Your body deserves comfort and support, even on the nights when sleep does not come easily.

Understanding sleep pressure and body rhythm

Sleep pressure builds the longer we are awake, while the body clock responds to light, timing and routine. Irregular schedules, long naps, shift work, illness and reduced daylight can affect both systems. A stable wake time and morning light may be more useful than forcing an exact bedtime. Changes should be gradual and adapted for disability, caring and work demands.

When the bed becomes a place of worry

After repeated difficult nights, bedtime can trigger monitoring: 'What if I cannot sleep?' Clock-checking and calculating remaining hours increase alertness. Turn the clock away, reduce the pressure to achieve sleep and focus on resting safely. If you are awake and frustrated, a quiet low-light activity elsewhere may help break the association between bed and struggle.

Creating a realistic wind-down

A wind-down does not need to be an elaborate routine. Choose a short sequence that signals fewer demands: dimmer light, medication as prescribed, washing, comfortable clothing, a familiar audio and writing tomorrow's urgent tasks down. Repetition matters more than perfection. If screens support regulation or communication, adjust brightness and content rather than imposing an unrealistic total ban.

Sensory comfort and safety

Temperature, fabric, noise, light, smells, body position and another person's movement can all affect sleep. Consider blackout curtains, ear protection, white noise, separate blankets, supportive pillows or a different sleep space. Trauma may make darkness, silence or closed doors feel unsafe. A night-light, predictable check or familiar sound can be valid support.

Thoughts that become louder at night

Daytime activity can hold worries at a distance until the environment becomes quiet. Set a brief earlier 'thinking time' to write concerns and next steps. At night, remind yourself that problem-solving is less reliable when exhausted. Use a phrase such as, 'This matters, and I will return to it tomorrow.' Ground in a familiar story, gentle audio or neutral mental task.

Food, substances, medication and health

Caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, pain, reflux, breathing difficulties, restless legs, menopause and medication timing can affect sleep. Alcohol may cause drowsiness while disrupting later sleep. Do not stop prescribed medication abruptly; discuss timing and side effects with a clinician. Persistent snoring, gasping, severe daytime sleepiness or sudden changes warrant medical attention.

Coping after a poor night

Avoid treating the day as ruined. Lower non-essential demands, eat and hydrate regularly, seek daylight and use brief rest without spending the whole day chasing sleep. Be cautious with driving or hazardous tasks if very drowsy. One difficult night is uncomfortable but does not predict every future night. Returning gently to routine can protect the next sleep opportunity.

When to seek support

Speak with a GP or sleep professional when problems persist, significantly affect functioning or involve breathing, movement, nightmares or extreme changes in sleep need. Psychological support can help with insomnia, anxiety or trauma-related sleep difficulty. Urgent help is needed if sleep loss accompanies severe confusion, mania, immediate danger or inability to stay safe.

A gentle reflection

What feels most important for me to remember? What is one small and realistic form of support I could offer myself today?

This resource offers general information and does not replace personalised medical or mental health care. If you are in immediate danger or unable to keep yourself safe, contact emergency services or an urgent crisis service where you live.