

Coping with Nightmares and Sleep

People often experience sleep problems and have nightmares after traumatic experiences. Nightmares can be similar to flashbacks and are often caused by being reminded of the traumatic events either during the day or at night. Nightmares happen because your brain is trying to process the traumatic events. There are ways to cope with these problems.

"I'm Okay".

When you wake up tell yourself that you are okay and that the traumatic event is not happening right now.



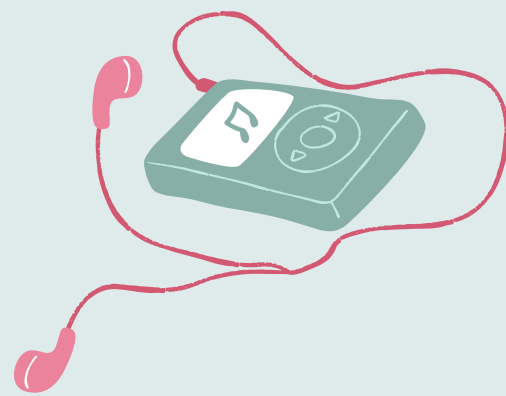
Create a pre-sleep routine.

Take time to relax in the evening, and allow yourself some calm time before bed. Do some light exercise. Avoid heavy meals. Avoid caffeine and go to the toilet before going to bed. Try to only go to bed when you are really tired.



Practice relaxation.

If you wake up during the night, try doing a relaxation, breathing or visualisation exercise or listen to an audiobook or have a sudoku/puzzle to hand. You can also switch the light on and get up from your bed if you do not fall back asleep quickly.



Keep a routine.

Try to go to bed and get up at the same times each day or night - depending on your shift times. It might be helpful to set an alarm clock to wake up, regardless of the amount of sleep you have had. This will help you to develop a regular sleep pattern.



Ground yourself.

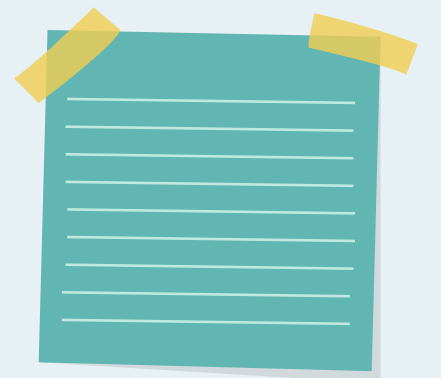
Try using a strong, pleasant smell to calm and 'ground' you; have a comforting object or photo of your loved ones next to your bed for easy access.



Read a 'coping' statement.

You can also write a 'coping statement' to keep next to your bed when you wake up. This might say:

"I am safe and well right now" or **"I are doing the best job I can right now"**.



What else might be soothing for you to read?

Adapt your environment.

Keep your bed as a soothing place. While sleep experts recommend keeping your bed only for sleeping, that can feel very difficult if you have long periods of time awake and anxious.

You may find that having soothing music or gentle light will help you feel more relaxed than silence and a dark room.

Try not do things in bed that will make you more anxious or alert, such as watching the news or reading distressing information.

