



**DECODE
PAIN**

Understanding Pain Through Science



SLEEP HYGIENE IN CHRONIC PAIN

Introduction

If you're living with persistent pain, you already know how challenging sleep can be. Poor sleep can make your pain worse, and pain can make it harder to sleep - creating a frustrating cycle.

The good news? Small changes to your sleep habits can make a real difference. This guide provides practical, evidence-informed strategies to help you improve your sleep and manage your pain more effectively.

Understanding the Sleep-Pain Connection

Your brain produces different hormones throughout the day and night:

- **Cortisol** (wake-up hormone) helps you start the day but should decrease by evening
- **Serotonin** (daytime hormone) keeps you alert, increases with daylight and activity
- **Melatonin** (sleep hormone) is produced when it gets dark

When sleep quality suffers, your body produces more stress hormones, which may increase pain sensitivity. Getting your sleep right is an important part of your pain self-management.

Your Sleep Hygiene Checklist

These strategies are based on the research. Try implementing them one at a time (don't try to do everything at once). Remember you are not aiming for perfection, you are making small, sustainable changes.

1. SAME ROUTINE EVERY DAY

- ☐ Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day (including weekends)
- ☐ Get natural light exposure at dawn and dusk
- ☐ Set an alarm to start winding down for bed (work backwards from wake time)

Why: Your body has an internal clock. Each organ functions optimally at specific times. Consistent scheduling helps synchronise your rhythms.



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2. WIND-DOWN RITUALS

Begin soothing activities about an hour before bed:

- ☐ Warm bath with Epsom salts
- ☐ Read a physical book (not on a screen)
- ☐ Gentle stretching or yoga
- ☐ "Brain dump" - write down persistent thoughts
- ☐ Listen to calming music or sleep story
- ☐ Relaxation or mindfulness meditation

Why: These activities signal to your brain it's time to transition to sleep.

3. ELIMINATE SLEEP DISRUPTORS

Screen Time:

- ☐ Stop electronic devices 30-60 minutes before bedtime (blue light delays melatonin)

Food and Drink:

- ☐ Avoid heavy meals, sugary foods 2-3 hours before bed
- ☐ Limit caffeine in afternoon/evening
- ☐ Reduce alcohol and nicotine 2-3 hours before sleep

Activity:

- ☐ Finish intense exercise at least 2-3 hours before bedtime
- ☐ Reduce or eliminate daytime naps if having trouble sleeping at night

Why: These substances and activities stimulate your nervous or digestive system, making it harder to produce melatonin.

4. DAYTIME ACTIVITY AND EATING

- ☐ Get regular physical activity outdoors in natural light
- ☐ Exercise in morning or afternoon (not evening)
- ☐ Eat meals at consistent times
- ☐ Have last meal at least 2-3 hours before bedtime

Why: Daylight and movement help release serotonin and use up stress hormones. Regular meal times help synchronise your body's internal clock.



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5. OPTIMISE YOUR SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

- ☐ Keep bedroom cool (15-20°C or 60-68°F)
- ☐ Make it dark (blackout curtains), or use an eye mask
- ☐ Keep it quiet (white noise, fan, or humidifier if needed)
- ☐ Keep it clutter-free and stress-free
- ☐ Ensure comfortable, supportive mattress and pillow

Why: Your body needs to cool down to fall asleep. Darkness triggers melatonin production. A calm environment reduces stress.

6. USE YOUR BED ONLY FOR SLEEP AND INTIMACY

- ☐ Only go to bed when sleepy
- ☐ If awake for 20-30 minutes, get out of bed
- ☐ Do something calm in another room until sleepy
- ☐ Avoid TV, work, or devices in bed

Why: This teaches your brain to associate bed with sleep, not wakefulness.

7. PARK YOUR WORRIES

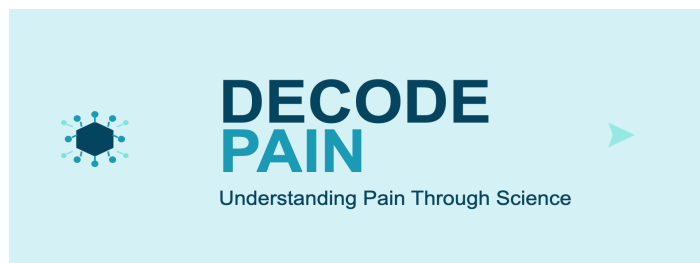
- ☐ Keep a notepad next to your bed
- ☐ Write down circulating thoughts
- ☐ Tell yourself you'll deal with them tomorrow

Why: Writing concerns down reduces anxiety and stops repetitive thinking.

8. GET NATURAL LIGHT EXPOSURE

- ☐ Spend time outdoors during the day
- ☐ Get morning light especially (helps set your internal clock)
- ☐ If working shifts, get bright light when you should be awake

Why: Natural light sets your body's clock and promotes better nighttime sleep.



What to Expect

Sleep improvements take time. Be patient and persistent - it may take several weeks for your body to adjust.

Remember:

- Progress over perfection
- Small changes add up
- Listen to your body - what works for others may not work for you
- Consult your healthcare provider if problems persist

Better sleep is possible and can make a real difference to how you experience pain.

Want to Learn More?

Join the Decode Pain Mini Course [here](#).

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Disclaimer: This information is for educational purposes only and should not replace advice from your healthcare provider. The content is based on current evidence and best practice guidelines for sleep hygiene. Individual circumstances vary, and what works for one person may not work for another. If you have concerns about your sleep or pain, please consult with an appropriate healthcare professional.