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Keeping yourself fit



Dear Seafarer,

We are extremely pleased with the initial reaction to our new publication, **Health Watch**, which was launched in November 2011. The response has been very encouraging.

In this, the second issue, we focus on the controversial topic of sexually transmitted diseases, and try to dispel some of the misconceptions regarding AIDS and HIV. We also deal with the subjects of diet, exercise and other ways you can improve your health such as giving up smoking and moderating your alcohol intake.

Health and safety is not just about how you do your job in order to avoid accidents; it is about how you live your life. Fatigue and stress can have a direct impact on your work. Tiredness leads to lapses in concentration, sometimes with disastrous consequences. The officer of the watch who misses a target on the radar, or a light on the horizon, because of a lapse of concentration due to fatigue can then find his ship in a close quarters situation resulting in collision. The

incident does not have to be of this magnitude. A fitter can lose his fingers in an accident when using a lathe, simply because he lets his attention wander for a few seconds. There are many examples of accidents that can be avoided by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and trying to ensure that you have an adequate and regular sleep pattern.

We make no excuses for repeating the message contained in our first edition. A healthy lifestyle is vitally important. Your health should be your concern. Do nothing about it and you may live to regret it (or not, as the case may be)!

If you would like any further information about any of the topics in this edition, please contact us at the e-mail address on the back page. We also welcome any suggestions for items to be included in future editions of **Health Watch**.

A poster 'Getting fit on board' is enclosed highlighting the key messages set out in this edition of **Health Watch.**

Playing it safe



As a seafarer, it is important that you take care of your health and although it is a sensitive subject, this includes looking after your sexual health. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 340 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted infections (STIs) may affect the population at large on an annual basis and although treatments have improved for a number of these conditions – including HIV/AIDS where the medical advancement of antiretroviral drugs has improved quality and length of life for those living with the disease – the effects of STIs can go far beyond the symptoms alone.

So it is important to do everything you can to look after your sexual health.

According to the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare, seafarers may be at greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections owing to factors such as working and living at a distance from their regular partner, an enhanced chance of sex with casual partners due to travelling and a lack of information about prevention and risk.

But what can seafarers do to look after their sexual health? According to Dr Lucas Viruly, Port Physician at the Medical Centre for Seamen in Amsterdam: "having sex with a

condom should be as normal as eating with a knife and fork." Kirsty Metcalfe, Accounts Manager at condom distributor and manufacturer Safex, agreed: "If you are travelling, it is important to carry a high quality, secure condom product. In the worldwide market, we are aware there are a huge number of condom manufacturers who do not offer the quality of those products which carry certifications such as a CE Mark or British Standards Institution's Kite Mark."

She also emphasised the importance of seafarers getting regular health check ups, both prior to sailing and on their return, particularly since common STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and HIV may not produce symptoms once contracted.

For seafarers living with STIs, particularly HIV/AIDS, social stigmatisation is still an unfortunate (though legitimate) concern, as Jason Warriner, Clinical Director at HIV and sexual health charity The Terence Higgins Trust, said: "There is still a lot of stigma and misunderstanding around HIV in society. It is vital to raise awareness about HIV, how it is transmitted and more importantly, how it is not transmitted, so people are educated and if they do meet someone with HIV, they do not discriminate or stigmatise them."

Despite fear and misconceptions surrounding the illness, seafarers should understand that mistreatment and bullying of those with HIV is not acceptable on board and the privacy of HIV positive seafarers should also be respected. Jason Warriner again: "A diagnosis of HIV should not stop you going on board and working. Employers should keep an employee's diagnosis confidential and ensure they have access to support if needed, which you would provide for anyone with diabetes or asthma."

"Somebody who is well, stable and on treatment can get on with the job – a lot of people now only need to go to hospital once every three, four or six months. They may just get on and take their tablets and they will be fine – if they are well and stable there is no reason they can not work on board."

Thanks to improved treatments, HIV is now regarded as a long term condition which, though serious, is manageable. Mr Warriner also described an increase in people over the age of 50 being diagnosed with HIV – a statistic which should be observed by the ageing seafarer population. Ultimately, HIV is an indiscriminate illness so take a universal approach towards risk and always use a condom.

New guidelines on HIV/AIDS



New guidelines on HIV and AIDS have been released to shipping companies to raise awareness of risks and to give guidance on prevention for seafarers.

The guidelines have been published by The National Maritime Occupational Health & Safety Committee comprising the UK Chamber of Shipping and maritime unions Nautilus International and RMT. The Chamber first published guidelines on HIV and AIDS in 1985 and has worked since then to ensure that seafarers are aware of the situation to which, due to the global nature of their occupation, they might find themselves more exposed.

Issues highlighted include the dangers of blood transfusions in certain countries, the risk of inadequately sterilised medical equipment and hazards associated with dental treatment.

Also included are details on the risks that may arise from getting tattoos or piercings in high risk areas and equipment that can be used to prevent exposure to infected blood.

The guidelines also aim to combat ignorance surrounding HIV/AIDS particularly about the risks and how it is spread. They highlight that 'there is no risk to fellow workers or the general public from normal social and work contact with an employee who is infected with HIV'.

The guidelines also state that companies should take steps to promote the health and welfare of seafarers, support health promotion and behaviour change programmes on HIV and AIDS, eliminate prejudice and discrimination against employees suffering from HIV infection and provide support in

confidence for any employees known to be suffering from HIV infection.

It is also recommended that up-to-date information and advice on HIV and AIDS be provided to all sea staff and managers in induction programmes and in ongoing training programmes and that the company should ensure supplies of condoms are carried on all ships and easily accessed by all seafarers.

HIV/AIDS –

Common Misconceptions

I can get HIV by being around people who are HIV-positive

Evidence shows HIV is not spread through touch, tears, sweat or saliva.

You CANNOT catch HIV by:

- +Breathing the same air as someone who is HIV-positive
- +Touching a toilet seat or door knob after an HIV-positive person
- +Drinking from a water fountain
- +Hugging, kissing or shaking hands with someone who is HIV-positive
- +Sharing eating utensils with an HIV-positive person
- +Using exercise equipment at a gym
- +You CAN get it from infected blood, semen, vaginal fluid or mother's milk.

I can get HIV from mosquitoes

Several studies show no evidence to support this, even in areas with lots of mosquitoes and cases of HIV. When insects bite they do not inject the blood of the person or animal they have last bitten. Also, HIV lives for only a short time inside an insect.

I'm HIV-positive – my life is over

In the early years of the disease epidemic the death rate from AIDS was very high. Today, anti-retroviral drugs allow HIV-positive people – and even those with AIDS – to live much longer.

I'm straight and don't use IV drugs – I won't become HIV-positive

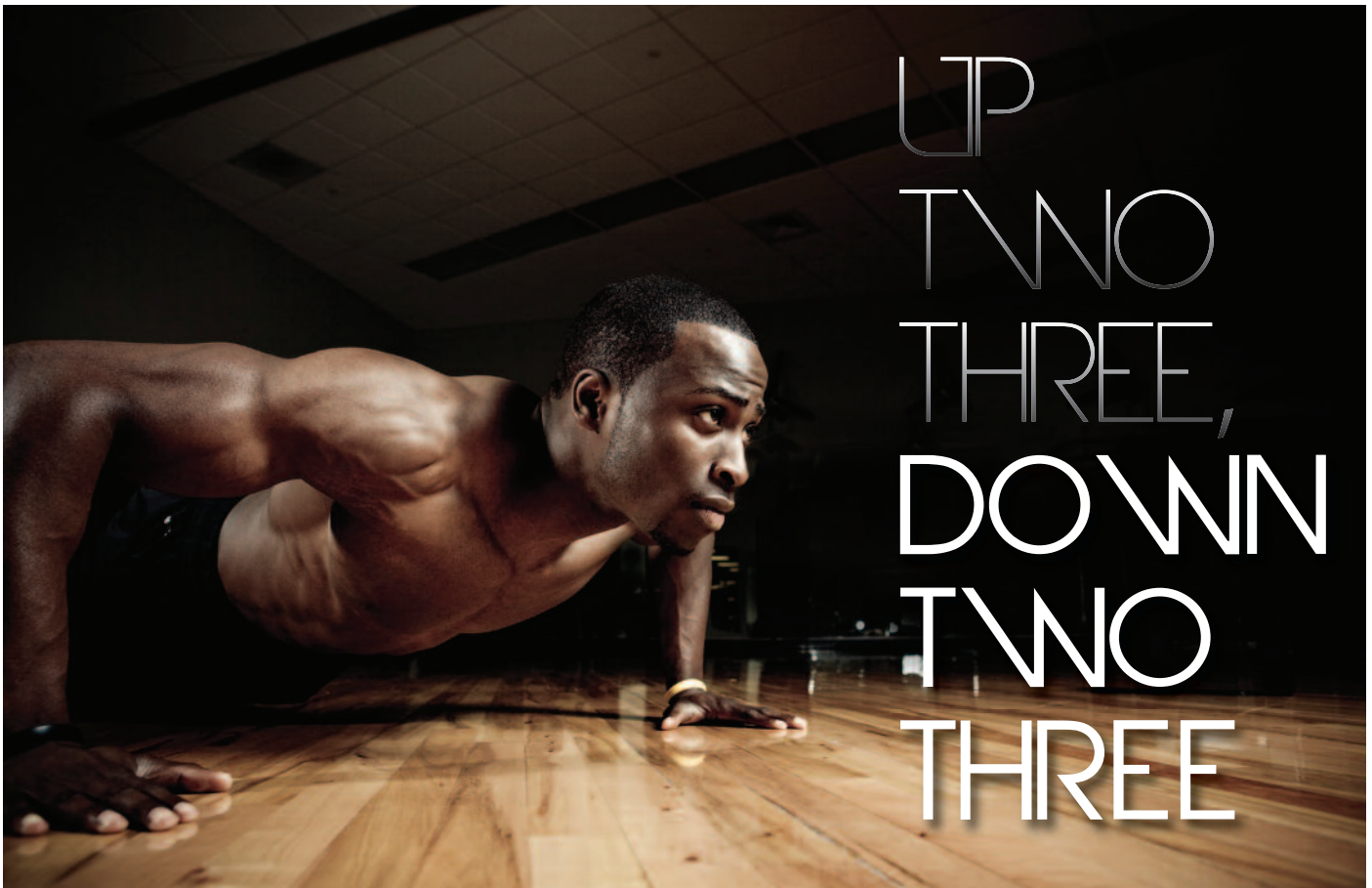
Most men do become HIV-positive through sexual contact with other men or through intravenous drug use. However, of those infected, about 16% of men and 78% of women, became HIV-positive through heterosexual contact.

If I'm receiving treatment, I can't spread the virus

When HIV treatments work well, they can reduce the amount of virus in your blood to a level so low that it does not show up in blood tests. Research shows, however, that the virus is still hiding in other areas of the body. It is still essential to practice safe sex so you do not pass on the virus.

You can't get HIV from oral sex

Although it is less risky than some sexual practices, you can get HIV by having oral sex with either a man or a woman, so always use a latex barrier.



A healthy crew it can be said is a happy crew but what about a health-conscious crew? In today's shipboard environment where the crew are more likely to tuck into something deep fried than finely grilled, can we be sure that our valued asset is getting the cardio-vascular workout he deserves and, maybe more importantly, needs?

Many of you may attest to the notion that a fully-equipped gymnasium on board ship is definitely a luxury rather than a norm. A crew member is more likely to retire to his cabin after a tough watch armed with a good book rather than dive in to get changed and head off to the ship's fitness suite so he can put the demands of body and mind into sharp equilibrium.

Shipboard gymnasiums can be seen by some as an extravagance but the task is trying to get a philosophy of fitness and health established not just on the ship but in the chain of command back on shore and in the company headquarters.

When fitness initiatives are taken up and supported owners and employers can get some excellent results.

So how fit are seafarers today and what can they do to keep fit and healthy?

Today, health professionals recommend that most, if not all, days of the week we cover 10,000 steps a day to develop or maintain good health. This equates to eight kilometres (five miles), but does every seafaring job require we expend the same energy as an eight-kilometre walk?

Engineers may be nodding their heads citing the many deck stairs they cover during their shifts. Front of house restaurant staff and cabin stewards may also expend many energy calories as they undertake their daily work duties. Seafarers can meet the recommended guidelines of 10,000 steps of energy expenditure by deck walking, stair climbing, treadmill walking or running and/or undertaking moderate crew gym exercise for at least 30 minutes most, if not all, days of the week. The easy employment of a pedometer can be used to calculate the number of steps you are currently taking each day.

Annually, smoking or tobacco-related illnesses account for 20% of all deaths in the US today. In shipping, many seafarers have enjoyed the pastime of smoking only to discover that later in life they suffer from cancer or heart related diseases which require urgent medical intervention and treatment. If

you are reading this article and you smoke, we strongly urge you to consider quitting. Speak to your ship's master, company health coordinator or personnel manager to obtain the most appropriate intervention method for you.

As health and fitness awareness is our main focus, seafarers are encouraged to implement changes in nutrition, fitness and health habits.

Many ships' kitchens serve food which has been fried or cooked in large amounts of butter, with portions served on plates that could suffice for two meals, followed by high calorie desserts served most days of the week. If your waist measurement (around your navel) is currently 40 inches (100 centimetres) or more, you are likely to be eating the wrong kinds of food. A food pyramid chart can help crew to gain a better understanding of dietary needs and a switch to more fruit and vegetables instead of fried or sugary alternatives is also recommended. A change in your diet will bring improvements in body composition (body weight and body fat percentage), blood pressure, cholesterol and sugar levels, alcohol moderation and smoking cessation, fatigue management and fitness (muscular strength, flexibility and endurance).

Cancers linked to lifestyle

Over 40% of cancers are caused by lifestyle choices such as smoking, drinking and poor diet, according to a review by Cancer Research UK.

The evidence proves that in many cases we have the power to change how our future health is mapped out.

Tobacco is the biggest culprit causing 23% of cancers in men and 15.6% in women with lack of fresh fruit and vegetables being the next biggest factor for men, while for women it is being overweight.

Lead author Professor Max Parkin said: "Many people believe cancer is down to fate

or 'in the genes' and that it is the luck of the draw whether they get it. Looking at all the evidence, it's clear that around 40% of all cancers are caused by things we mostly have the power to change."

The best advice for men appears to be to stop smoking, eat more fruit and vegetables and cut down on alcohol, while for women it is also to stop smoking and watch your weight.

Some risk factors are well known, such as the link between smoking and lung cancer and one in 25 cancers is linked to a person's job such as being exposed to chemicals or asbestos.

But other risk factors are less easily recognised. If we look at breast cancer for example, nearly a tenth of the risk comes from being overweight or obese and for oesophageal or gullet cancer, half of the risk comes from eating too little fruit and vegetables. For stomach cancer, a fifth of the risk comes from having too much salt in the diet.

Some cancers, like mouth or throat cancer, are caused almost entirely by lifestyle choices but others, such as gall bladder cancer, are largely unrelated to lifestyle.

Dr Rachel Thompson, of the World Cancer Research Fund, said the report added to the

"now overwhelmingly strong evidence that our cancer risk is affected by our lifestyles".

Dr Harpal Kumar, Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK, said leading a healthy lifestyle did not guarantee a person would not get cancer but the study showed "we can significantly stack the odds in our favour."



Simple measures to guard against cancer

- + Reduction or cessation of tobacco use
- + Reduction or cessation of alcohol intake
- + Increase of non-smoking areas on board
- + Protective clothing should be worn when outdoors in the sun, as well as sunscreen or sunblock no less than SPF 25
- + More attention should be paid to a proper diet. Limit fat consumption, high calorie intake, large amounts of meat and increase the intake of fruit and vegetables, foods rich in antioxidants and beneficial fatty acids such as Omega 3 and olive oils
- + Implementing an exercise programme on board
- + Mandatory vaccinations and preventative testing and screening
- + Education and awareness of the risks you face and any necessary action you might take to avoid or minimise such risks

Researchers based their calculations on predicted numbers of cases for 18 different types of cancer in 2010, using UK incidence figures from 1993 to 2007.

In men, cases were linked:

- 6.1% to a lack of fruit and vegetables
- 4.9% to occupation
- 4.6% to alcohol
- 4.1% to being overweight or obese
- 3.5% to excessive sun exposure and sunbeds

In women:

- 6.9% to being overweight or obese
- 3.7% to infections such as HPV (the biggest cause of cervical cancer)
- 3.6% to excessive sun exposure and sunbeds
- 3.4% to lack of fruit and vegetables
- 3.3% to alcohol

RISKY BUSINESS ■ drugs and alcohol on board

When working on board, it is important to be alert, sober and able to face the varied challenges of being a member of your ship's crew – but seafarers who abuse alcohol and drugs are likely to find it difficult to fulfil their duties effectively and safely while under the influence.

Consider the case of Zbigniew Krakowski, a Polish captain who was jailed for one year in 2007, having crashed the 1,922gt cargo ship *Jork* into a gas platform off the coast of Norfolk, England, following an alcohol binge which rendered him almost three times in excess of the legal drinking limit. The accident caused £7-£10 million in damages, not including lost revenue from destruction of the platform and the sinking of *Jork* itself.

In another catastrophic incident, illegal drug use was attributed to the sinking of the Canadian ferry *Queen of the North* in March 2006 killing two passengers and leaving 99 others in need of rescue. The Transportation Safety Board confirmed crew members had admitted to regularly smoking cannabis between shifts while on board and ashore prior to the accident.

Ivan Roberts, Senior Consultant at alcohol and drugs screening provider Noviche, explained how drug and alcohol misuse on board remains a threat to safe operations: "Our experience with seafarers shows that alcohol is still commonly abused at work, accounting for 87% of all for-cause tests and has no

boundaries of age, nationality, religious or social background."

"Cannabis is the most commonly detected illicit substance followed by cocaine and amphetamines and is mostly detected in British and Dutch seafarers. The average industry failure rate is 8% of all tests administered which accounts for 22% of males aged between 18 and 29 years. However, evidence suggests the profile of those involved in drug misuse does not conform to any particular stereotype."

But it is not just illegal drugs which can cause problems on board. On a foggy November morning in 2007, the container ship *Cosco Busan* crashed into the Oakland Bay Bridge, spilling 53,000 gallons of fuel oil into San Francisco Bay. Captain John Cota admitted in court to not disclosing all the prescription drugs he was taking and confessed to taking a drug for a sleep disorder at the time – a fact which led prosecutors to question if he had been able to interpret radar and bridge equipment correctly.

He was sentenced to 10 months in prison, while the ship's owners were ordered to pay a settlement of \$3.6 million, to be split between 120 local fishermen whose livelihoods were harmed as a result of the spill.

So remember – be honest with your employer and disclose any health problems or medications you are taking which they might not be aware of.



You are what you eat

Obesity is a becoming a major problem for many seafarers with poor diet and lack of exercise being the main causes.

Many are eating more than they need to, and often they are eating the wrong types of food and are not able to burn off the calories, that combine to pile on the weight. Also, when we eat and drink more calories than we need this can lead to all sorts of health-related problems including increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

So, how much should you eat? The amount you need will depend on a

range of factors including your size and how physically active you are but, as a general rule, the average man needs around 2,500 calories a day to maintain a healthy body weight and the average woman 2,000 calories a day.

An important part of a healthy diet is consuming the right amount of calories, so you balance the energy you put into your body with the energy you use. But a healthy diet is not just about eating the right amount, it is about eating the right kinds of food offering a wide range of nutrients to avoid conditions such as osteoporosis.

You can reduce the number of calories you eat by making healthier choices when it comes to food and drink. Often that means cutting back on or swapping high fat or high-sugar foods for alternatives containing fewer calories.

Also, think about portion sizes – research suggests we tend to eat more when we are served more, so resist piling up your plate. Aim to eat three balanced meals a day with healthy snacks in between if you need them.

If you are overweight or obese, you should combine eating fewer calories with more physical activity in order to gradually lose weight and help keep the weight off.

Adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week, such as fast walking or cycling. You can divide this time up into 30-minute sessions five days a week and split that 30-minute session further into smaller sessions of at least 10 minutes.



A balanced diet

You need to eat a range of foods to get all the nutrients and fibre your body needs.

The five main food groups are:

- +Starchy foods such as bread, pasta, rice and potatoes: They contain carbohydrates which give you energy.
- +Fruit and vegetables: They are good sources of many nutrients, particularly vitamins, minerals and fibre. Aim for at least five portions every day.
- +Milk and dairy foods such as cheese and yoghurt: They are important sources of protein, calcium and vitamins, but choose lower fat varieties.
- +Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein: Oily fish in particular is also rich in long chain omega fatty acids which can prevent heart disease.
- +Foods high in fat and sugar: Fat is an important part of your diet but you do not need very much. The type of fat is also key – try to replace foods high in saturated (bad) fats such as butter with those rich in unsaturated (good) fats such as avocado and olive oil.

Healthy food and drink swaps

Swap

Breakfast:

Whole milk
Sugar-coated breakfast cereal
Fried breakfast

Lunch:

White bread and bagels
Butter/cheese in baked potato
Tuna melt panini

Dinner:

Creamy or cheese sauces
Fried chicken and fries
Ice-cream

Drinks & Snacks:

Sugary drinks
Salted nuts
Cake

For

Semi-skimmed or skimmed milk
Porridge or wholegrain cereal
Boiled eggs and wholemeal toast

Wholegrain varieties
Reduced sugar/salt baked beans
Tuna salad sandwich on wholemeal bread

Tomato or vegetable-based sauces
Chicken casserole and vegetables
Sorbet

Water
Unsalted nuts
Fresh fruit

Sick and tired?

Taking up one third of our lifespan, sleep is a huge part of our lives which many of us take for granted but by taking steps to improve your sleeping pattern, you can take advantage of other benefits such as improved memory function, alertness and mood, in addition to the benefits for your overall health.

Chronic sleep deprivation is medically linked to an increase in the likelihood of cardiovascular diseases such as stroke and hypertension and is also believed to be a possible contributory factor in conditions such as diabetes and obesity – particularly because sleep is required to regulate the hormones responsible for appetite. It should be noted that sleeping regularly for over nine hours at a time could also have poor consequences for health.

The link between sleep and good health is clear but a poor sleeping pattern can also have an impact on safety on board, just as driving a car on land can prove fatal if the driver is suffering from fatigue. – As a seafarer you are responsible for ensuring you are well-rested before taking on your duties each day, especially those which involve ship navigation or working with heavy machinery.

But sometimes irregular shift patterns or problems with relaxation, noise levels or worries on your mind can be a barrier to a good night's sleep – so what can seafarers do to improve their sleeping patterns?

Professor Mike Barnett, Associate Director of Research at the Warsash Maritime Academy, who has conducted a



study on seafarer fatigue, said it is vital for seafarers to acknowledge their own boundaries. "With the best will in the world, work needs to be done, watches need to be kept but what is vital is awareness – being aware of fatigue as an issue and knowing we can all get tired at times."

You need to be aware of the signs in yourself and understand your own limitations, capabilities and resilience. If you understand yourself and when you get tired, you can better understand what to do about it.



Sleep tight: tips for a great night's rest

Keeping a regular routine is a great way to programme your body into a better sleep pattern. Going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time each night is the best way to manage this. When working irregular shifts, try and provide yourself with the same number of hours rest each night.

Regular exercise will help you unwind from daily stresses. Keep a regular exercise routine with moderate activity (but it is better not to exercise just before bedtime).

For those who smoke, cutting down on this habit may also help your sleeping pattern. Smokers can take longer to fall asleep than non-smokers and they may also wake more frequently through the night.

Ensure you have a sleeping environment which is at a comfortable temperature. A clean and tidy bedroom which is quiet and dark will also help you to relax and a comfortable mattress is also important.

In the evening, avoid eating too much food or drinking too much alcohol as this can interfere with sleeping patterns.

It is best if you are in a relaxed mood before bedtime – take a warm shower or listen to some relaxing music to help you unwind. Other activities which may help include yoga or listening to relaxation tapes.

Take the burden of work off your mind – before you go to sleep, write down a 'to do' list of any particular tasks or worries which need to be dealt with in your 'awake' time.

If you are having trouble sleeping, it is good to avoid tea and coffee as these contain caffeine – a stimulant which can be a barrier to a good night's sleep. Avoid drinking coffee or tea, especially just before bedtime – try drinking herbal teas or warm milk before bedtime instead.

Ultimately, if you are having real trouble switching off and getting to sleep, get out of bed and do a relaxing, enjoyable activity until you feel tired again, then return to bed.

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