Using Digital Mental Health for Sleep Problems

WHAT IS A SLEEP DISORDER?

It is recommended that adults get between 7 to 9 hours sleep per night, but many people regularly fall short of this. Prolonged and consistent difficulties falling asleep, waking up early and not being able to get back to sleep, or waking up feeling unrefreshed can be a sign of a sleep problem called insomnia.

Alternately, some people get too much sleep, nap regularly and yet continue to experience excessive daytime sleepiness. This is known as hypersomnia.

Other sleep disorders involve abnormal movements, behaviours, emotions, perceptions and/or dreams that occur during sleep or when falling asleep or waking up. Examples include sleepwalking, acting out dreams, discomfort in the legs alleviated by movement, or abruptly awakening from sleep with a sense of intense fear.

Sleep problems can be a sign of a serious physical illness. It is important to discuss any sleep concerns with your GP so that the cause can be properly identified and treated.

What are the symptoms of a Sleep Disorder?

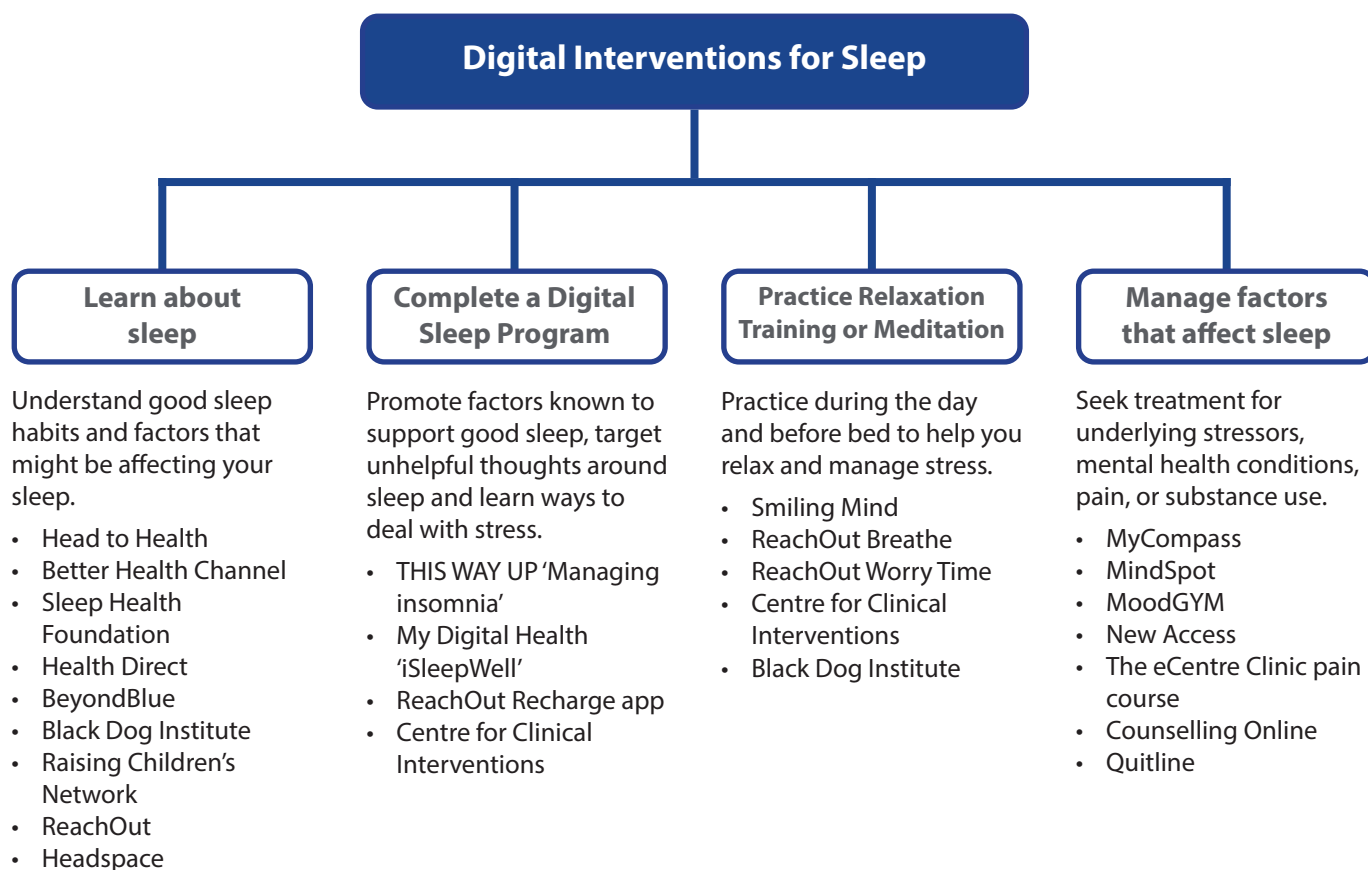|		
Difficulty falling asleep (longer than 30 minutes)	Waking up in the middle of the night	Waking up early in the morning and being unable to go back to sleep
Lack of energy/fatigue	Muscle tension associated with going to sleep	Sleeping too much
Needing to nap excessively	Racing thoughts before bed	Feeling wound up or anxious before bed or about sleeping
Restless feelings in legs	Poor concentration	Preoccupation with getting enough sleep
Irritability/frustration	Monitoring for signs of sleepiness	Sleepwalking or sleeptalking
Taking a book/phone/laptop to bed in case of lack of sleep	Excessive sleepiness during the day	Frustration with lack of sleep
Sleep terrors - waking abruptly with intense fear, often inconsolable	Feeling like you are falling when you drift off to sleep	Checking the clock

TREATMENT WITH DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH

Once a physical cause has been ruled out, digital mental health services can provide a convenient, low-cost and effective form of intervention for some sleep problems.

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Digital Interventions for Sleep

Learn about sleep

Understand good sleep habits and factors that might be affecting your sleep.

- Head to Health
- Better Health Channel
- Sleep Health Foundation
- Health Direct
- BeyondBlue
- Black Dog Institute
- Raising Children's Network
- ReachOut
- Headspace

Complete a Digital Sleep Program

Promote factors known to support good sleep, target unhelpful thoughts around sleep and learn ways to deal with stress.

- THIS WAY UP 'Managing insomnia'
- My Digital Health 'iSleepWell'
- ReachOut Recharge app
- Centre for Clinical Interventions

Practice Relaxation Training or Meditation

Practice during the day and before bed to help you relax and manage stress.

- Smiling Mind
- ReachOut Breathe
- ReachOut Worry Time
- Centre for Clinical Interventions
- Black Dog Institute

Manage factors that affect sleep

Seek treatment for underlying stressors, mental health conditions, pain, or substance use.

- MyCompass
- MindSpot
- MoodGYM
- New Access
- The eCentre Clinic pain course
- Counselling Online
- Quitline

What are 'digital mental health' services?

'Digital mental health' services are online programs, services, tools or apps designed to help Australians of all ages with mild-to-moderate mental health symptoms. They can be used as a standalone, self-driven treatment, or used in combination with face-to-face care. Some services can be used in crisis or as an 'in-the-moment' coping tool, while others are designed as full treatment interventions, with modules to be completed over weeks or months.

Can I trust these programs? How do I know they work?

All of the services promoted by eMHPrac have been funded by Commonwealth or State/Territory Government and have been through a rigorous testing and evaluation process. Evidence shows that for many people digital based mental health treatment can be as effective as face to face treatment[1].

1Andrews G, Basu A, Cuijpers P, Craske MG, McEvoy P, English CL, Newby JM. Computer therapy for the anxiety and depression disorders is effective, acceptable and practical health care: An updated meta-analysis. Journal of Anxiety Disorders. 2018; 55: 70-78

Do digital mental health services cost anything?

The majority of the digital mental health services promoted by eMHPrac are government-funded and completely free of charge for users. A few programs charge a small fee for access, but these costs are minimal and usually cheaper than the out-of-pocket cost for a single session with a Psychologist.