

SLEEP AFTER STRESS OR TRAUMA

UNDERSTAND SLEEP CHANGES WITHOUT BLAMING YOURSELF

After trauma or prolonged stress, the body may stay alert even when you want to rest. Sleep problems are common and treatable.

WHY SLEEP MAY CHANGE

- Nightmares, intrusive memories, worry, and feeling on guard can make bedtime feel unsafe.
- Some people avoid sleep because they fear dreams or being less alert.
- Pain, medication effects, caregiving, shift work, housing, disability, and other conditions can also affect sleep.

MAKE NIGHTTIME FEEL SAFER

- Use a predictable wind-down routine when possible.
- Reduce avoidable light, noise, or stimulation - while keeping any safety supports you genuinely need.
- Keep water, mobility aids, hearing/vision supports, medication instructions, or other accessibility needs within reach.

WHEN THE MIND STAYS BUSY

- Write down tomorrow's tasks so your brain does not have to hold them all night.
- Try grounding in the present: name where you are, the date, and what tells you you are here now.
- If relaxation increases distress, stop and choose a different grounding strategy.

NIGHTMARES & REMINDERS

- A nightmare can feel vivid without meaning the event is happening again.
- Orient to the room after waking: notice current sights, sounds, textures, and safe people or pets.
- Persistent trauma-related nightmares deserve professional assessment; you do not have to simply endure them.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- Talk with a health professional when sleep problems persist, impair daytime functioning, or involve loud snoring, gasping, unusual movements, medication/substance concerns, or severe nightmares.
- CBT-I is an evidence-based first-line treatment for chronic insomnia.

SAFETY

- Do not drive or do hazardous tasks when dangerously sleepy.
- Alcohol or other substances may seem to help with falling asleep but can worsen sleep quality and create other risks.
- Suicidal thoughts or immediate danger need urgent support; in the U.S., call/text 988 or 911 for immediate life-threatening danger.

Rest is a health need. Start with safety, accessibility, and one realistic sleep-supporting change.