

Your Health

 Health Partners

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THE BENEFITS OF FERMENTED FOOD

*plus articles on sleep and
neurodiversity celebration*

In this issue of *Your Health*, we delve into the world of fermentation – why fermented foods are so good for you, how to incorporate them into your diet and how to make your own kombucha. In addition, we celebrate neurodiversity just in time for Neurodiversity Celebration Week and investigate why 'good' sleep is so important (how we can get more of it!)

The Benefits of Fermentation

Fermentation is a process that has been used for centuries to preserve food. It is also a natural process that occurs in our own bodies.

Fermentation is a great way to add flavour and nutrition to foods and has become increasingly popular in recent years.

One of the main benefits of fermentation is the positive impact it can have on gut health.

The gut is home to trillions of microorganisms, including bacteria, viruses and fungi. These microorganisms make up what is known as the gut microbiome.

The gut microbiome plays a crucial role in many aspects of our health, including digestion, immune function and mental health. When the gut microbiome is out of balance, it can lead to a range of health issues.

Fermented foods are a great way to support the health of the gut microbiome. During the fermentation process, beneficial bacteria, or probiotics, are produced. These probiotics can help to restore balance to the gut microbiome, which can improve digestion, boost the immune system and even improve mental health.

Here are some of the ways that incorporating fermented foods into your diet can benefit your physical and mental health:



“Fermented foods are a great way to support the health of the gut microbiome.”

1. Improved Digestion: Fermented foods are packed with probiotics, which can help to improve digestion and reduce symptoms of digestive issues such as bloating, gas and constipation. Probiotics work by breaking down and digesting food more effectively, which can help to reduce inflammation in the gut and improve nutrient absorption.

2. Boosted Immune System: The gut microbiome plays a crucial role in immune function, and fermented foods can help to support a healthy gut microbiome. By introducing beneficial bacteria into the gut, fermented foods can help to reduce inflammation, fight off harmful pathogens and improve overall immune function.

3. Increased Nutrient Absorption: Fermented foods can help to improve the absorption of nutrients in the gut. This is because the probiotics in fermented foods break down food more effectively, making it easier for the body to absorb the nutrients it needs.

4. Reduced Inflammation: Inflammation is a natural immune response that can become chronic and contribute to a range of health problems. Fermented foods have been shown to reduce inflammation in the gut and throughout the body, which can help to prevent chronic disease and improve overall health.

5. Improved Mental Health: There is a growing body of research linking the gut microbiome to mental health. Fermented foods can help to improve mental health by supporting a healthy gut microbiome. By reducing inflammation and improving nutrient absorption, fermented foods can help to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

6. Weight Management: Fermented foods may also help to support weight management. Studies have shown that consuming probiotics can help to reduce body weight and fat mass. This may be because probiotics help to improve gut health and reduce inflammation, which can contribute to weight gain.

7. Improved Skin Health: The health of the gut microbiome has been linked to the health of the skin. Fermented foods can help to improve the health of the gut microbiome, which in turn can improve the health of the skin. Studies have shown that consuming probiotics can help to reduce inflammation in the skin and improve skin hydration.

Incorporating fermented foods into your

diet is a simple and delicious way to support your overall health.

With a little creativity and experimentation, you can find delicious ways to incorporate fermented foods into your diet and enjoy the many health benefits they have to offer.

Some of the most popular fermented foods include sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir and kombucha. To get started, you might try adding a dollop of sauerkraut to your sandwich, adding some kefir to your morning smoothie or drinking a glass of kombucha with your lunch.

Kombucha is a fermented tea that has become increasingly popular in recent years. It is a sweet, slightly tangy drink that is packed with probiotics and other beneficial nutrients.

“Kombucha is a fermented tea...packed with probiotics”



If you're interested in trying your hand at making your own kombucha, here's a simple recipe to get you started.

Ingredients:

- ▶ 4 tea bags (everyday black tea is fine)
- ▶ 100g/3½oz granulated or caster sugar
- ▶ 1.75 litres/3 pints just-boiled filtered water
- ▶ 1 medium kombucha scoby culture (available online)

Method

Put the tea bags and sugar in a very large measuring jug or heatproof bowl and pour over the just-boiled filtered water. Give the tea a good stir and leave to stand for 30 minutes. Lift out the tea bags and discard, then leave the tea to cool for a further 30-45 minutes or until lukewarm.

Pour the cooled tea into the prepared jar (you may need to use a funnel if you haven't steeped the tea in a jug). Place the kombucha scoby into the tea along with the starter liquid it has been stored with.

Place a piece of clean muslin over the top of the kombucha and secure with string or a rubber band. Leave at room temperature, out of direct sunlight. The kombucha will take from a few days to two weeks to brew. You will notice it changing colour and becoming a little cloudier as the days pass. After five days, spoon a little out and taste. If it tastes more like apple juice than tea, with a pleasant, slight tartness and a little fizz, it should be ready. If not, leave for another day or so and taste again. Some people like a stronger taste, so will leave longer (about 7-10 days), but to start with, you may want to drink when it is a little milder.

Transfer the scoby and approximately 150ml/5fl oz of the tea to a clean bowl, ready to make the next batch. Use as a starter liquid to make the next brew or cover and store in a cool, dark place for up to five days if you plan to use it again. Strain the rest of the brew through a fine sieve into clean, lidded bottles. Secure the lids and place in the fridge to chill. Drink within a week.

The kombucha will begin to become slightly fizzy at this point and will get fizzier the longer it is stored. This is caused by the bacteria within the liquid naturally producing carbon dioxide. Make sure you 'burp' the bottle(s) every day or so to release the build-up of gas. If you leave your bottled kombucha at room temperature for a day or two before putting in the fridge, it will become fizzier more quickly.

You can begin drinking the kombucha straight away, but it's best to start with small amounts (to avoid any digestive upset as your system gets used to the bacteria).



Harnessing Neurodivergent Strengths in the Workplace

You will, undoubtedly, have frequently heard the words ‘Neurodiversity’, ‘Neurodivergent’, and ‘Neurodivergence’, but what does it really mean for us in the workplace? Let’s break it down in simpler terms.

Neurodiversity is about recognising and celebrating the unique ways our brains work. We all have different strengths and ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving the world. This diversity is not just okay; it’s actually really positive!

The Benefits of Neurodiversity

Firstly, our society tends to have these ‘norms’ that decide what is considered normal or good. But who gets to decide what’s normal? Often, it’s the majority – and that might not be fair. What’s normal for one person might be uncomfortable for another. That’s where neurodiversity comes in, acknowledging and celebrating the differences.

Now, when it comes to work, neurodivergence is not new. Neurodivergence, and identification of neurotypes including ADHD, autism and dyslexia, have been recognised for quite some time now. Thankfully, awareness and understanding of neurodivergence has increased, but there’s still work to be done.

Understanding neurodiversity at work means realising that people experience and interact with the world in different ways because of diverse cognitive, emotive and sensory perceptions. We need to embrace these differences and use them as strengths, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that there can be disabling impacts – this is why we commonly use the term ‘dynamic disability’ to underscore that neurodivergent traits can have varying impacts.

Here’s the catch – many neurodivergent people don’t disclose their differences



at work because they fear stigma. This lack of disclosure means they miss out on personalised support, potentially affecting their wellbeing and job satisfaction. So, it’s crucial for workplaces to be safe spaces where everyone feels comfortable being themselves.

Studies have shown that teams with neurodivergent members can be more productive and creative. So, it’s not just about doing the right thing; it’s also good for business.

Practical adjustments and accommodations can make a big difference. Things like awareness training, reasonable adjustments and inclusive recruitment practices go a long way.

“Many neurodivergent people don’t disclose their differences at work because they fear stigma.”

array of strengths that make our workplace better for everyone.

How to Better Support Neurodivergent Colleagues

Being an ally to our neurodivergent colleagues is an essential part of creating an inclusive and supportive workplace. Here are some practical techniques and tips that each of us can use to empower and support our neurodivergent colleagues:

- ▶ **Educate Yourself:** Take the time to learn about different neurotypes and traits/characteristics. This knowledge helps you better understand your colleagues’ strengths and potential differences;
- ▶ **Open Communication:** Create an environment where open communication is encouraged. Let your neurodivergent colleagues know that you are open to discussions about their unique needs and preferences. Be willing to adapt your communication style to ensure everyone feels heard and understood;
- ▶ **Use Inclusive Language:** Words matter. Be mindful of the language you use, avoiding stigmatising or exclusionary terms. Encourage and model the use of inclusive language within the team. For example, avoid “normal”, replacing with terms like “typical” or “common”;
- ▶ **Respect Different Communication Styles:** Understand that not everyone communicates in the same way. Some colleagues may prefer written communication, while others may excel in verbal discussions. Be flexible and adapt your communication style to accommodate different preferences;
- ▶ **Provide Clear Instructions:** When giving instructions or feedback, be clear and concise. Break down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps. This not only benefits neurodivergent colleagues but can improve communication for the entire team;

Consider adapting work environments to suit diverse needs – quiet areas, desk dividers – or allowing the option to deactivate a camera during meetings can all make a huge difference to people at work.

Communication is key. Clear expectations, regular feedback and addressing concerns immediately help create a supportive atmosphere. Remember, it’s a two-way street – both employees and managers need to be aware and supportive.

In a nutshell, understanding and celebrating neurodiversity benefits everyone. It’s not just about being inclusive; it’s about tapping into a wide

- ▶ **Offer Support without Assumptions:** If you notice a colleague experiencing difficulties, offer support without making assumptions. Ask how you can help and respect their autonomy. Remember, not everyone wants or needs the same kind of assistance, so it's crucial to inquire about individual preferences;
- ▶ **Create a Neuro-inclusive Environment:** Advocate for changes in the workplace environment that promote neurodiversity. This could include flexible work arrangements, quiet spaces and sensory-friendly adjustments. By fostering an inclusive atmosphere, everyone benefits;
- ▶ **Encourage Self-Advocacy:** Support your neurodivergent colleagues in identifying their strengths and expressing their needs, aiding with self-advocacy. Encourage them to communicate their preferences with managers and team members. This empowerment promotes a culture of understanding and collaboration;
- ▶ **Be Patient and Understanding:** Recognise that everyone works at their own pace and may have different ways of approaching tasks. Be patient and understanding, avoiding unnecessary pressure. A supportive environment encourages neurodivergent colleagues to bring their best selves to work;
- ▶ **Celebrate Differences:** Finally, celebrate the diverse strengths and talents that neurodivergent individuals bring to the team. Recognise and appreciate the unique perspectives they offer, contributing to a richer and more innovative workplace.

By implementing these practical tips, each of us can play a role in creating a workplace where neurodiversity is not just acknowledged but celebrated, fostering an environment where everyone can thrive.

Neuro-affirming Language

Language is a powerful tool that can have a significant impact on how we perceive ourselves and others. When it comes to neurodiversity, using affirming language is essential to creating a supportive and inclusive environment.

“If you notice a colleague experiencing difficulties, offer support without making assumptions.”




Neuro-affirming language is language that acknowledges and respects the differences in how people's brains work, and it's an important aspect of creating a more inclusive workplace.

Here are a few ways that you can use neuro-affirming language in your daily life:

- ▶ **Avoid using Labels as Insults:** Labels like “autistic” or “ADHD” should never be used as insults. These are terms that describe how someone's brain works and using them as insults can be hurtful and dismissive. Instead, focus on the individual and their unique strengths and qualities;
- ▶ **Use Clear and Concise Language:** It's important to use clear and concise language. Avoid using slang or jargon that may cause miscommunication and confusion – strive to be as concise and specific as possible. This can help ensure that everyone is on the same page and can work together effectively;
- ▶ **Ask for Clarification:** If you're not sure what someone means or if you're having trouble achieving successful communication, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Asking questions can help you better understand someone's perspective and can prevent misunderstandings;
- ▶ **Celebrate Diversity:** Finally, it's important to celebrate diversity and acknowledge the unique strengths and qualities that everyone brings to the table. Instead of trying to make everyone fit into a specific mold, we should be celebrating the things that make us all different. This can help create a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone.

Using neuro-affirming language is an important aspect of creating a more inclusive workplace. By being considerate with the use of word choices, using clear and concise language, asking for clarification and celebrating diversity, we can help create an environment that supports and respects everyone's unique way of thinking.

As an individual, you can make a difference by being mindful of the language you use and advocating for the use of neuro-affirming language in your workplace. 

Sleep

One in three of us suffers from poor sleep, and the consequences can be more serious than feeling grumpy or unfocused. Sleep and mental health are closely related: living with a mental health condition can affect your sleep and poor sleep can affect your mental health.

Lack of sleep can also make us feel physically unwell. It's linked to heart disease, diabetes, premature ageing and road accident deaths.

We all have nights when it's hard to fall asleep or we wake up several times. Most sleep problems sort themselves out within a month; however, longer periods of poor sleep can seriously affect our lives.

Self-help techniques can get you back to a more normal sleeping pattern. But sleep problems can be symptoms of other conditions, such as depression or thyroid problems, so speak to your GP if they continue.

What is 'Normal' Sleep?

'Normal' sleep consists of four stages, each of which has a particular purpose. The interplay between the sleep cycles allows us to manage the storage space in our brains.

During sleep, information is moved from short-term storage in one area of the brain into long-term storage in a different part of the brain. Sleep enhances creativity and our ability to come up with solutions to complex problems. During sleep, the brain's waste removal system is more active, detoxifying the brain of harmful proteins.

Insufficient sleep can adversely affect emotional regulation, with the potential for detrimental effects on social function and relationships. Individuals are more likely to react negatively to obstacles and can swing between mood states – from joy to irritability. Individuals are also less likely to read facial expressions correctly and may interpret expressions, even neutral ones, as threatening.



“Sleep enhances our creativity.”

The physical effects of poor/lack of sleep:

- ▶ Reduced resistance to minor infections such as the common cold;
- ▶ More likelihood of weight gain;
- ▶ Increased risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke and heart failure;
- ▶ Potential link to increased cancer risk – breast, colorectal and prostate;
- ▶ Increased risk of Alzheimer's disease;
- ▶ Increased rate of anxiety and depression.

Cognitive effects of poor/lack of sleep:

- ▶ Reduced visual attention and the ability to form new memories;
- ▶ Impaired ability to learn new information;
- ▶ Increased risk of developing a neurodegenerative disease.

Workplace effects of poor/lack of sleep:

- ▶ Increased rates of accidents/incidents;
- ▶ Reduced/altered perception of risk;

- ▶ Absenteeism/presenteeism – sleep loss can have a huge impact on performance and productivity;
- ▶ Impaired alertness and performance;
- ▶ Impaired cognitive/problem-solving abilities.

Driving and sleepiness:

- ▶ 10-20% of all crashes are estimated to be caused by fatigue;
- ▶ One in eight drivers admit to falling asleep at the wheel;

Police statistics show that fatigue contributes to about 4% of fatal road crashes and 2% of all collisions in Britain. However, it is likely that the true figures are far higher because fatigue is hard to spot and, unlike alcohol and drugs, police can't test for tiredness.

Worldwide, it is estimated that between 10% and 20% of all road crashes are fatigue related.

What are the Stages of Sleep?

Sleepers usually pass through four stages of sleep, with each complete set completing one cycle.

Each cycle lasts around 1.5 hours, and we need to experience all four stages to wake up rested.

A good night's sleep consists of five or six cycles, whereas disturbed sleep consists of far fewer.

Non-rapid eye movement sleep (NREM) is divided into three stages: NREM1, NREM2, NREM3.

NREM1: When we first fall asleep, we enter NREM sleep. This is very light sleep where, if somebody wakes us, we might feel that we were not actually asleep.

NREM2: Whilst still light sleep, your heart rate and brain waves slow down and you are more switched off from your surroundings.

NREM3: NREM3 is a deeper stage of sleep from which we're more difficult to rouse, and some may feel disorientated if woken from this. This is the most restorative phase of our sleep, where repair and growth occur. This phase of sleep is also important for our immune system, creativity and insightful thinking.

REM: Generally, after going through the NREM stages, we enter stage 4, known as rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which the EEG shows as being similar to wakefulness or drowsiness. It is during the REM stage of

sleep that we dream.

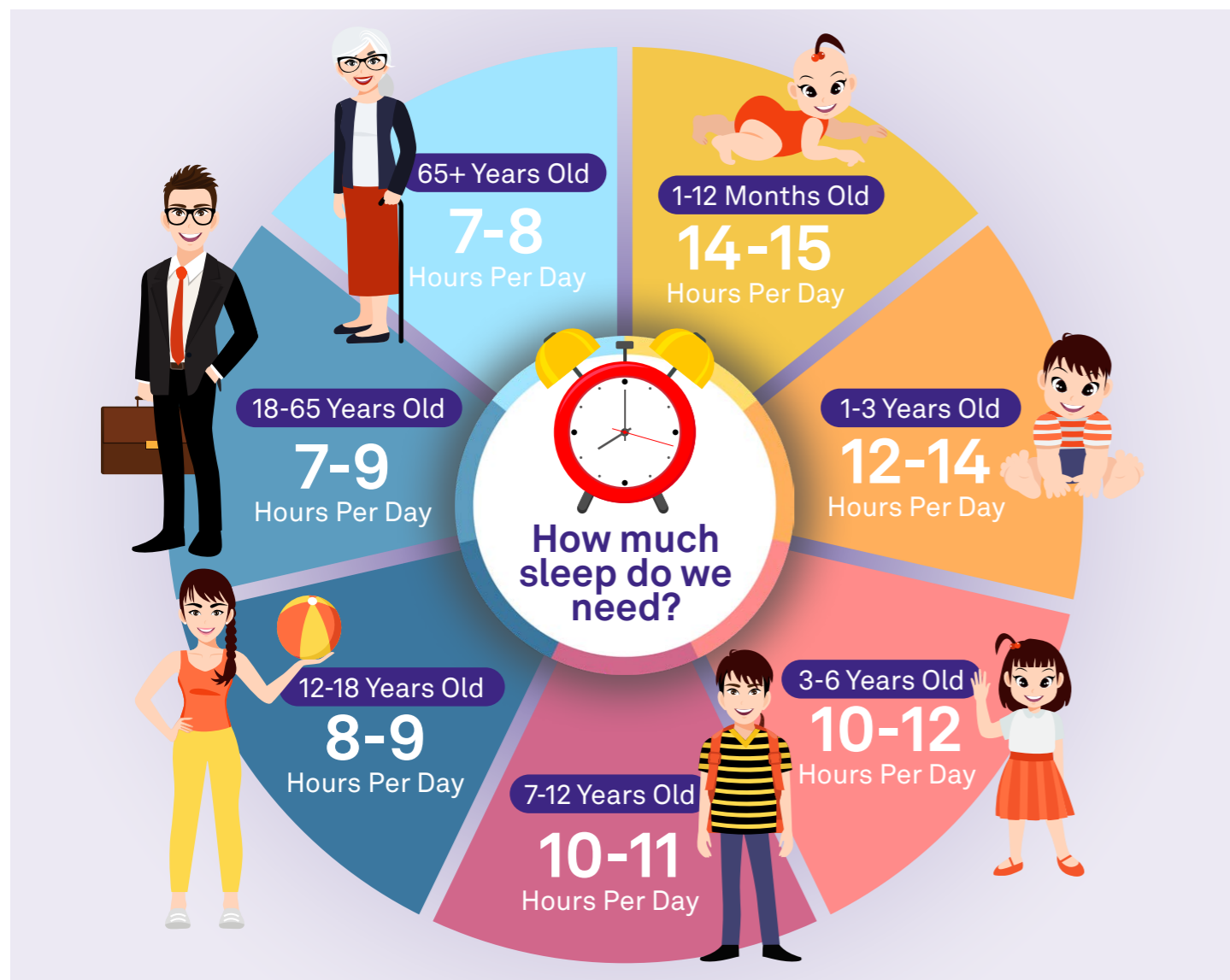
Ways to Fight Fatigue and Get Better Sleep

Many cases of tiredness are due to stress, not enough sleep, poor diet and other lifestyle factors.

If you feel you're suffering from fatigue, which is an overwhelming tiredness that isn't relieved by rest and sleep, you may have an underlying medical condition. Consult a GP for advice.

To get a better night's rest, try these self-help tips to restore your energy levels:

- ▶ **Eat Often to Beat Tiredness:** A good way to keep up your energy through the day is to eat regular meals and healthy snacks every three to four hours, rather than a large meal less often.



► **Get Moving:** Regular exercise will make you feel less tired in the long run, so you'll have more energy. Even a single 15-minute walk can give you an energy boost, and the benefits increase with more frequent physical activity.

Start with a small amount of exercise. Build it up gradually over weeks and months until you reach the recommended goal of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, such as cycling or fast walking, every week.

► **Lose Weight to Gain Energy:** If your body is carrying excess weight, it can be exhausting. It also puts extra strain on your heart, which can make you tired. Lose weight and you'll feel much more energetic.

Apart from eating healthily, the best way to lose weight and keep it off is to be more active and do more exercise.

► **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** There's some evidence that talking therapies such as counselling or CBT might help to fight fatigue, or tiredness caused by stress, anxiety or low mood.

See a GP for a referral for talking treatment on the NHS or for advice on seeing a private therapist. Alternatively, speak to your Employee Assistance Programme or OH Department to see if they offer services in this area. There are also free online options for CBT, which may be a good route to explore.

► **Cut out Caffeine:** The Royal College of Psychiatrists recommends cutting out caffeine if you're tired. It says the best way to do this is to gradually stop having all caffeinated drinks over a three-week period.

Caffeine is found in:

- Coffee;
 - Tea;
 - Cola;
 - Energy drinks;
 - Some painkillers and herbal remedies.
- Try to stay off caffeine completely for a month to see if you feel less tired without it. You may find that not consuming caffeine gives you headaches. If this happens, cut down more slowly on the amount of caffeine that you drink.

► **Drink Less Alcohol:** Although a couple of glasses of wine in the evening can help you fall asleep, you sleep less deeply after drinking alcohol and normal sleep cycles are disrupted. The next day you'll be tired, even if you sleep a full eight hours. Cut down on alcohol before bedtime – you'll get a better night's rest and have more energy.

The NHS recommends that men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units a week, which is equivalent to six pints of average-strength beer or 10 small glasses of low-strength wine. Try to have several alcohol-free days each week.

► **Drink More Water:** Sometimes you feel tired simply because you're mildly dehydrated. A glass of water will do the trick, especially after exercise.

Try this bedtime meditation video: www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/bedtime-meditation/

Other tips include:

- Go to bed and get up in the morning at the same time every day;
- Avoid naps during the day;
- Take time to relax before you go to bed;
- Create a restful sleeping environment;
- Try to keep the temperature in the bedroom between 16-18°C;
- Keep your bedroom just for sleeping;
- Make sure your bed and pillows are comfortable;
- Don't smoke – nicotine is a stimulant;
- Write a journal, plan the next day or read just before sleep.

If you can't sleep, get up! Rather than lying there worrying about it, do something



relaxing until you feel sleepy again and go back to bed.

A regular bedtime routine will help you wind down and prepare for bed – once you work out a routine that works for you, stick to it. **(YH)**

Additional Resources:

1. [Mental Health.Org](http://MentalHealth.Org)'s page on sleep;
2. The road safety charity Brake's website;
3. The NHS's site on tiredness.

NEXT ISSUE:

- Stress awareness
- Allergy awareness
- Testicular cancer

At Health Partners we offer a full range of tailored health and wellbeing services.

Our thinking is innovative. We constantly develop new responses and tools designed to address the health and wellbeing challenges that face your business and people.

Our commitment is total. We invest in our services, creating new ones and keeping in step with every client. We constantly explore new ways of working and make no compromises in the quality of our services.

Simply put, we are here to help people be their best.