



# Flashbacks and nightmares



*Many people seek counselling for sexual assault or sexual abuse because they are experiencing constant reminders of the event in the form of flashbacks and nightmares.*

*It can make it hard to rest, sleep or settle nightmares.*

*It can make it hard to rest, sleep or go back to sleep.*

***Getting good rest and sleep is important for staying healthy and feeling happy.***

## Flashbacks

A flashback is a reminder of the trauma experience and it can feel as though it's happening all over again. It can seem very real and you may see, hear, smell and feel everything that happened during the original trauma.

## Nightmares

Nightmares are common for people who have experienced sexual assault or abuse. This can affect your sleep and lead to long-term health problems.

# Tips for a better night's sleep

- Watch your caffeine intake. More than one cup of instant coffee a day can decrease the chance of you getting a good night's sleep.
- Exercise a little bit every day, but not just before going to bed.
- Try not to sleep during the day, no matter how exhausted you feel.
- Think about ways to make your bedroom comfortable. For example, use soft lighting, make sure your sheets, pillow and blanket feel comfortable. Try to reduce bright light and noises coming in during the night or early in the morning.
- Have a bedtime routine; get ready for bed 30mins before lying down, have a herbal tea, stretch your body, relax through breathing. Cut down on the use of mobiles and TV just before bedtime.
- When lying in bed, sometimes focusing your mind on sleep podcasts, playlists or stories can help stop an over-thinking mind. If that doesn't work, try being on Country in your mind until you fall asleep.
- Using marijuana to help you sleep could increase symptoms of depression and make you sleep worse, not better.

## If you have a flashback:

- Breathe slowly and deeply
- Remind yourself that you are safe
- Focus on what you hear and see around you.
- Ground yourself through physical sensations. Wiggle your toes or tap your knees to bring yourself back into the present.

## If you wake up from a nightmare:

- Breathe slowly and deeply
- Imagine all your muscles relaxing
- Remind yourself that you are safe
- Turn on the light and look around
- Focus on something else that helps you to relax (eg: listening to soft music or reading a book)

***If you can't sleep, or you have flashbacks and nightmares for more than two weeks, it is a good idea to speak to your doctor or a counsellor.***

## Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)

**Metropolitan area:** A free 24-hr emergency service providing medical and counselling services for people who have experienced a recent (within 14 days) sexual assault, and counselling services for any form of unwanted sexual contact that has happened in the past for all genders ages 13 years and above.

**State-wide area:** Advice and education and training can be provided to services across Western Australia.

Call SARC on (08) 6458 1828 or Freecall 1800 199 888.

Email SARC Education and Training on [SARCTraining@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:SARCTraining@health.wa.gov.au)

### Yorgum Healing Services

Disability counselling, intensive family support and National Redress services

**Call 1800 469 371**

### 13 Yarn

The first national crisis support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping, 24hrs/7 days a week

**Call 139 276 (13YARN)**

### WA Police

#### Sex Assault Squad

To report a sexual assault

**Call (08) 9428 1600  
131 444 (after hours)**

### Non emergencies

Police assistance  
and reporting

**Call 131 444**

**Emergency Call 000** Police, Fire, Ambulance