

Louise: Do you want to just firstly do a quick introduction of who you are and what you do?

Joanna Kippax: So, yes, my name's Joanna Kippax, I am a sleep practitioner and nurse prescriber, and I have been in the NHS doing work since 1983, so a very long time, so we'll gloss over that very quickly, and left in 2017 to focus just completely on sleep, and so I founded WyeSleep, and that is an independent sleep health service. And I see clients on a one-to-one basis for treatment of insomnia, and I also host the Sleep Retreat, which is a weekend away of insomnia treatment. So, they're my 2 main projects, but I also do workshops for corporate clients as well. So, yes, a bit of everything, really, anything to do with sleep.

Louise: Amazing, thank you Jo, and we will talk a little bit more about how to get in contact with WyeSleep and the Sleep Retreat at the end as well. Obviously we are focussing a little on anxiety and worry because it's the WorryTree podcast, but first of all do you want to talk about why sleep is so important generally?

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely. And this is actually where my interest started, which is one of the reasons why it's called WyeSleep, plus we live near the River Wye. But sleep is fundamental to our health, we need it for physical health, we need it for emotional health. We spend 30% of our lives asleep, and it has a really, really profound impact on every single aspect of our health. It's pretty much like if you imagine every single cell in the body has got a little body clock, and if you imagine, if you know anything about rowing, if you have a cox at the front of the rowing boat, all of those rowers need to row in sync, don't they, all together? And sleep is just like the cox, it keeps everything all in synchrony, and if everything is all synchronised, then the body works so much better. So, yes, there's a whole list of things I can go into if you want, but yes, there are so many, every single system in your body is impacted by sleep.

Louise: So, if sleep goes off course, that can impact on every single thing?

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely. And it's really important actually to say that it is completely normal to have a few bad nights of sleep, because often what happens is people get a few bad nights and they think, 'Oh, my goodness, I'm not going to sleep tonight. Oh, gosh, here we go,' and that will set off a whole run of insomnia. But actually, when you're stressed, or when you're worried about anything, it is completely normal not to sleep, and so it's really important to keep that in your mind. But yes, we've all been there, haven't we? Blimey, especially with children and whatnot. After a bad night, you feel like a bit of wet lettuce, don't you? You just feel really emotional, you can't think straight, you don't work productively, you eat more carbs, you're just chewing down the doughnuts as fast as you can get your hands on them. And everybody has been there and done that, and so you can relate to how sleep impacts absolutely every part of your health.

Louise: So, it's a bit of a snowball then really, isn't it?

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely. And this is where the anxiety side of things really kicks in.

Louise: So, sleep and anxiety.

Joanna Kippax: Yes. So, if you imagine that there is a bear at the door of your bedroom, are you going to fall to sleep? Probably not. The majority of people are not going to fall asleep. And basically, that is a self-protective mechanism, it's a natural mechanism that the body has to say, 'It is just too dangerous to go to sleep,' and that's exactly what happens with anxiety. So, anxiety, physically, it's the

same response as that bear. So, you've got your adrenaline hormone whizzing up, you've got your stress hormone whizzing up, and that switches off your sleep mechanism. So, you can be absolutely, completely exhausted, but you will definitely not sleep, because your brain is saying, 'It is way, way, way too dangerous to sleep,' so that's what anxiety is. So, it's about trying to monitor and reduce that anxiety so that you reduce the impact of the bear at the door. Does that make sense?

Louise: It does make sense. So, it's almost like our evolutionary response?

Joanna Kippax: Totally, completely, exactly the same.

Louise: Except the bear isn't there.

Joanna Kippax: The bear's not there, but-,

Louise: But your body thinks it is.

Joanna Kippax: Body thinks it is. But you could say that the bear was there from the point of view that if you have loads and loads of stress going on, then it's a case of re-framing that bear so it turns into-, that stress might still be there, you might still be worried about your job, you might still be worried about your circumstances, whatever it is. So, it's about re-framing that stress so it ceases to become a grizzly bear, and you move it on to Paddington Bear. So, you've still got that stress going on, you're still worried about your job, whatever it is, but you just learn how to manage that stress so it doesn't impact on your sleep quite so much. Does that make sense?

Louise: It does make sense. How do we reframe that bear?

Joanna Kippax: Indeed. Right, re-framing a bear, who'd have thought, huh? We're talking about sleep and you can just listen to this podcast-,

Louise: No, we're re-framing a bear.

Joanna Kippax: And now we're thinking we're re-framing bears. So, how do we reframe a bear? We change that then-, so, basically, at night, your brain is notoriously unreliable about thinking problems through, okay? The reason being-, and there is a very good reason for this, the frontal cortex of your brain, which is your sensible, problem-solving part of your brain, is being very sensible, and it's tucked up fast asleep and offline, whereas your fear centre and your emotional centre, they are having a party, they are wide awake and partying. And so, any decision, any thought process that you go through at night, is going to be influenced by anxiety, and fear, and emotion. So much so that you can even get to the situation where you just think, 'Oh, my goodness, I've left the washing on the line,' at 2:00 in the morning, and, 'The world is going to come to an end because I've left the washing on the-, ' ridiculous. You wake up in the morning, don't you, and think, 'What on earth was I thinking? That's stupid, that's mad.' So that is why. Now, if you can tell yourself, and remind yourself, 'This is not thinking time,' okay, 'The night-time is not thinking time, the daytime is thinking time,' when your frontal cortex, which is the rational, sensible bit of your brain, is going to help you make a sensible decision. And this is where you can do things like scheduled worry, and this is the sort of thing that you've got in your WorryTree resources, isn't it?

Louise: Yes, absolutely.

Joanna Kippax: This is exactly where WorryTree is just so, so useful, because exactly what it's there

for.

Louise: Yes, it's for that scheduled, 'I'm going to do this then.'

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely. So, if you can imagine you are downloading your worry by using the WorryTree app, by using all those resources and just thinking, 'Okay, I am going to worry now, I'm going to think about this problem now.' So that when you get into your bed and your crazy hippocampus brain tells you that you need to worry about it now, you think, 'No, it's (TC 00:10:00) fine, it's okay, I'm worrying about it in the day. I do not need to worry about it now. I am going to actually take it off, I'm going to remove it, and this is not thinking time.' So, it's being very, very, very proactive, and it takes practice, it takes a lot of practice. So, practise in the day, because your brain doesn't like new things at night. So, practise that in the day, use your WorryTree app to just segment things into a time where you are actually going to think about it, and then you will tell yourself at night, 'I can put that on my list of things to worry about tomorrow, that's fine.' And I have a pen and paper next to my bed, and if I suddenly wake up and think, 'Oh, my goodness, gosh, I'm going to forget this,' I will just jot it down, and then I can leave it. And if you put your mind to bed before your body, really, really, really key to actually separating your worry time.

Louise: And I suppose you can do that with a bit of compassion for yourself can't you? I wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning because something's woken me, and straight away, that time is just, 'Oh, my gosh, what if this happens, what about this?' And it's just brain going for it, and it's all of the irrational stuff at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Joanna Kippax: Of course, and that is because your irrational brain is having a party, thank you so much. We'll talk quickly, if we can, about why you do wake up at that time, because it is a very, very common physiological time to wake up.

Louise: Oh, really?

Joanna Kippax: Yes. This is because your cortisol, which is your stress hormone, is decreasing during the early part of the night, but just about 3 o'clock in the morning, it's just a little surge to increase so that it's preparing your body to wake for the day. So, your blood pressure goes up, your blood sugar goes up for a little bit, and it's just a little tweak of just thinking, 'Right, come on, in a couple of hours' time you're going to need to get going,' coupled with a change in sleep cycle. So, you start dreaming more at that time of the night, and it's much easier to wake you in your dream sleep than it is in your deep sleep, which is the beginning of the night. So, you get this double whammy, really, you get an increase in cortisol, a change in sleep cycle patterns, and also, your need for sleep has actually reduced by that stage, because you've had a good few hours already, haven't you? Well, you hope you have. If you haven't, come and see me. Yes, so it's a triangle really of reasons of why you would suddenly wake up at that time. So, it is actually quite important to get all your winding down done first, because if your stress hormone is high, if you're going through a really, really stressful time, your stress hormone is going to be high earlier on in the night, and so that tiny little tweak will just tip it even higher. Does that make sense?

Louise: It does. So, the 2:30, 3 o'clock in the morning waking is really common.

Joanna Kippax: Totally normal.

Louise: It's because physiologically you're starting to kick in for the day.

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely.

Louise: Just knowing that means if I do wake up I can think, 'It's okay-,'

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely, 'This is normal.'

Louise: Just saying to myself, 'It's okay, this is normal, your thoughts are starting to race, but this isn't thinking time because my brain isn't at its best for thinking right now, but I'll pick it up in the morning,' that can be enough?

Joanna Kippax: That can be enough. The other thing too to bear in mind is that your sleep cycle changes every 1.5 to 2 hours, and so at the end of the sleep cycle, you're going to wake, and so you will wake at least 6/7 times every night without even being aware of it. So, the other thing to bear in mind is when you do wake, you don't think, 'I've woken!' Because so many of my clients say, 'I keep waking up, I keep waking up at night,' you will, and you will never change that.

Louise: Everybody does?

Joanna Kippax: Everybody does, everybody does all of the time, that's totally normal. The difference is that 'normal' sleepers, in inverted commas, or good sleepers, whatever you want to call them, will just roll over and go back to sleep, whereas people who sleep less well will suddenly think, 'I've woken, oh my goodness, oh gosh, here we go,' and then obviously the cycle of stress really kicks in. So, waking in the night is okay, 'Hold on,' and that's the other thing to tell yourself at 3 in the morning, 'This is all normal, this is absolutely fine, I am warm, I'm safe, I'm comfortable, I'm going to just fall back to sleep.' And if you can fall back to sleep within 10/15 minutes, that's all great. If you can't, get up, move out of the room, and don't sit there for ages fretting about getting back to sleep, because you build that association with being awake in bed. And our brains are so good at associations, if I showed you a picture of a fir tree with some lights on it, what would you think?

Louise: Christmas tree.

Joanna Kippax: You'd think Christmas tree, wouldn't you? Exactly. So, we are so good at associating stuff. And again, if you are repeatedly in your bed awake, your brain is going to get into bed and think, 'Right, what's she going to do? Is she going to be asleep? What's she going to do? I'm not sure.' But what you want, is that connection, is the only thing that you're going to do is sleep. So, cutting out television, screens, all the rest of the stuff previously to that, otherwise it thinks, 'Oh, she might go on her phone for a minute,' but you want to narrow that option, the drop-down list, down, so, 'Yes, sorry, sleep is happening in this bed, that's all that's happening.'

Louise: So, you wake up, your mind's racing, you don't feel like you're going to go back to sleep any time soon, get up.

Joanna Kippax: Get up, move out, absolutely.

Louise: Go and do something else?

Joanna Kippax: Yes, just go downstairs, move out of the room, or if you're a 1-bedroom and you can't move out, just sit in a chair for a minute, just to disassociate yourself from your bed, or just sit on end of your bed if you've got nowhere else to sit. And just break that association with being awake. But yes, just go back to bed when you're feeling a little bit more sleepy, maybe half an hour later. Don't

spend hours downstairs, but just half an hour or so, and just think, 'Right, I'm going to go,' and just see how you feel.

Louise: Can excessive sleep increase anxiety?

Joanna Kippax: It is a very interesting one, actually. Excessive sleep is almost always a symptom of something else, so it's either-, there are sleep disorders, there are 81 sleep disorders to choose from, and hypersomnolence, which is the name for sleeping too much, is one of them, and there's a whole range of different sleep disorders that would cause that. So, that is something that's worth looking into in a bit more detail. Sleeping too much doesn't cause anxiety, but it is quite often a key feature of depression, so there's another reason for the sleeping too much. And this is where it's really important to actually pinpoint the reason, rather than just leave it.

Louise: So, if you seek support for managing depression, for the root cause of that, then that can help with the over-sleeping?

Joanna Kippax: Yes, absolutely. And also, sometimes it's the quality of your sleep, because you can sleep for a very, very long time and still feel absolutely exhausted. Now, there are plenty of sleep disorders that will make that happen, which we won't need to go into details now, but it is worth checking out, that if you've got really un-refreshing sleep, again, there is a reason for that. Whether that's a physical reason, whether that's an emotional reason, every single mental health disorder's got an element of sleep disturbance (TC 00:20:00) with it, so it could be an emotional difficulty, but it also could be a physical difficulty. And 50% of people with depression have actually got one of the sleep disorders that are undiagnosed, really, really important to get that checked out.

Louise: You hear a lot that everybody needs 8 hours sleep a night, is that true? Is it different per individual?

Joanna Kippax: What shoe size do you take? You may not want to say.

Louise: 5.5-ish, depending on the shop.

Joanna Kippax: Okay.

Louise: Depends on the shop.

Joanna Kippax: Exactly. I don't take 5.5, I take 4.5 or 5. Everybody has got one foot bigger than another.

Louise: Yes.

Joanna Kippax: Yes, exactly, really annoying. But yes, everybody's sleep need is different, and there is no one size fits all, it just doesn't happen. And also, if you've climbed Everest during the day, your sleep need is going to be pretty, pretty high, I would say. If you've sat on the sofa watching Netflix for most of the day, your sleep need is not going to be the same as your Everest day. So, we don't need the same amount of sleep all the time, and that's where a lot of the media say, 'You need to go to bed at the same time everyday,' why? Absolutely not. If you've had a really lazy day and you go to bed at the same time, you're not going to get to sleep, so you're going to get there, and you're going to think, 'Oh, heck, what's going on? I'm not sleeping. Oh, my goodness, I've got a sleep problem,' no, you haven't, you haven't built your sleep drive. You don't need to be in bed at that time. So, your sleep need

changes all of the time. Just as every day is different, so is every night.

Louise: So, different people need different amounts of sleep, but then also, as an individual you'll need different amounts of sleep, depending on what you've been doing.

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely.

Louise: There's a lot around just being kind to yourself about it then, isn't there? Just practising a bit of, 'It's okay, this is normal, I am normal.'

Joanna Kippax: Absolutely fine. The other thing to bear in mind with that as well is that we tend to think, 'Gosh, I'm sleeping really badly, I need to have a really early night.' No, early nights are the stuff of the Devil. Just do not do early nights. But basically, I do like an analogy, I hope that's alright. Think about a balloon, okay? So, you've got a balloon in your mind. First thing in the morning, you have got a deflated, flabby little balloon, and everything that you do throughout your day goes to inflate that balloon, okay? Now, you need to inflate that balloon until it's absolutely completely bursting, and then you can get to sleep, and you will stay asleep. That's called your sleep drive, okay? If you go to bed when your balloon is half empty, you'll get to sleep, but you won't stay asleep, because your sleep drive, your need for sleep, is just not high enough. Sleep's a bit brutal in that it won't come if you don't need it, it's just not going to happen. It won't just think, 'Oh, she likes a bit of extra sleep, I'll just stay asleep for a bit,' that's not going to happen. So, if you don't need it, it will not happen. So, if your balloon is deflated and flabby, and you've had the massive lie-in the day before, you've got actually less time during the day to blow up that balloon, and so that next night that you go to sleep, you will really struggle to get to sleep. And then you'll get into bed, and you'll think, 'Oh, heck, I'm not sleeping. Oh, my goodness, here I go, I'm developing a sleep problem, this is awful.'

So, just build your sleep drive, only go to bed when you are absolutely, completely dropping. Only go to bed when your balloon is fit to burst. And if you have a nap during the daytime, what's going to happen to your balloon? Lovely that it is, and I do like a nap, and don't say never, but if you're having problems sleeping at night, napping is a disaster. Napping is like eating a doughnut before a meal, you have just absolutely shrunk your sleep drive, you've shrunk your balloon right down, you've just made it so much harder for your body to get to sleep the next night. Does that make sense?

Louise: It does make sense. Is there anything else we can do to support us in getting a good night's sleep?

Joanna Kippax: Okay, think of your balloon, stick with that lovely balloon. Basically, wake up-, and this is really boring, and I do apologise, people will switch off at this point. But waking up at the same time every day, whether it be weekend, whether it be holiday time, whatever, that is going to give you the same amount of time for blowing up your balloon, okay? So, it's anchoring your wake time, and then your body starts to expect sleep at night. Now, if you sleep well all of the time, just don't worry about, just carry on with your lie-ins and carry on exactly as you are, because your sleep is fine. If you are having a problem sleeping for a couple of weeks, just hold tight, and anchor your wake time, wake at the same time every day, get out into the morning light, or get yourself a daylight lamp, really, really, really important, and then go to bed only when you are sleepy.

Louise: So, a lot of what we can do to help our sleep is in the morning?

Joanna Kippax: Totally. Sleep starts in the morning. Sleep is a 24 hour process, it is nothing to do with just what happens at night.

Louise: I'm guessing that applies to children as well?

Joanna Kippax: 100%.

Louise: Because we talk a lot about supporting children going to bed with a bedtime routine, but actually, getting them up in the morning then-

Joanna Kippax: Yes, absolutely. Teenagers are a wee bit different in the sense that teenagers have shifted their body clocks, and so teenagers are night owls, and so they will not get to bed early, they can't. So, you can say, 'Look, you should be in bed early, what are you doing?' all the rest of it, it will not happen. They can't go to sleep, it's a biological thing. So, they need to go to bed later, but they also need to wake up later, and this is where it's really hard for our teenagers, because that is not fitting in with school. So, a lot of teenagers actually slept better in the lockdown because they fitted in with their body clock. And the same with night owls, anybody who's a night owl was better because they could just shift their work pattern a bit later, and got up later, and that's all good. But we're beastly to poor old night owls, they have a really hard time because they cannot get to sleep until late, but we're making them get up at the crack of dawn, so they're our sleep-deprived population, they're the people who really, really struggle. So, if you are a night owl, it's tough, it's really, really tough. So, you have to be a little bit more flexible perhaps with night owls, but in the holiday times, if they can get up later, but within a similar sort of time. It's when you have these huge changes, these enormous changes, where at the weekend you're sleeping until midday, and then at the weekday you've got to get up at 6:00, it's when you get this massive change, that's when you start to run into trouble.

Louise: That's really helpful, especially as a step-parent of a pair (TC 00:30:00) of teenagers.

Joanna Kippax: These kids are not being difficult when they say that they can't sleep, they cannot. And so if you're going to bed too early, you almost develop insomnia, because they're sitting in bed thinking, 'But I can't sleep, I can't sleep, oh, my goodness, I can't sleep.' No, you can't sleep, get up, it's fine, get up, do something, diddle about, not in your bedroom, but somewhere else, because your bedroom is only for sleep.

Louise: If there's 1 thing that you want people to remember and do, what would that be?

Joanna Kippax: Does it have to be 1? Can I have a couple?

Louise: Alright, you can have 2, but don't tell anybody.

Joanna Kippax: Okay, shh, we're not saying. Basically, firstly, don't worry about your sleep, don't worry about not sleeping sometimes, that is totally, completely normal. The next thing is get into the morning light, and this is something that in the winter, and when we're all off to work, we're off to school, our exposure to light is so, so diminished, we're hardly exposing ourselves to light at all. And light is the trigger for good sleep, it will switch off your sleep hormone and switch on your body clock properly. And so if you get a daylight lamp, and this is where daylight lamps are so good for teenagers, you can just literally shine it, and take your glasses off if you wear glasses, or contact lenses, take those off, and just sit 20 minutes in front of the daylight lamp, or be outside for 20 minutes, and that will do absolute wonders for your sleep.

Louise: I have a daylight alarm clock and I think it's absolutely brilliant.

Joanna Kippax: It's gorgeous, absolutely, such a lovely, proper way of waking up, isn't it? Because you're waking up with your natural sleep cycle, rather than a horrible noise that's going to put your blood pressure up.

Louise: If somebody wants to get in touch with you, where can they find you?

Joanna Kippax: Yes, well, I am wyesleep.co.uk online. If they want to email me, I'm wyesleep@gmail.com, I'm on Instagram, I'm on LinkedIn, I'm on Facebook, all of those things, just put in WyeSleep, and that's W-Y-E Sleep. So, yes, hopefully you can find me there.

Louise: Thank you so much, Jo.