

4. How does sleep affect pain?

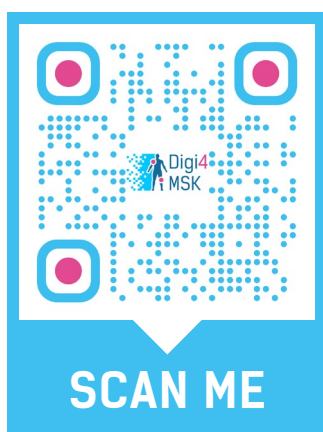
Elena, 42, works alternating day and night shifts at a supermarket. Her lower back started aching after long hours standing at the checkout. At first, she blamed her shoes and bought new ones, but the soreness did not go away.

The pain was worse after her night shifts. She noticed she woke up feeling stiff, and by the end of the week, her whole body felt tense. *"Maybe it's my job"* she thought, *"or maybe I'm just getting older"*. Still, what puzzled her most was how pain seemed stronger after a bad night's sleep, even when she had not done anything extra.

At home, she often fell asleep on the sofa with the television on, then tossed and turned the rest of the night. Her alarm clock felt like an enemy. Caffeine and painkillers helped her stay awake, but by the weekend she felt exhausted and sore.

One morning, after sleeping barely four hours, Elena tried to stretch and felt her back tighten again. It did not make sense—how could simply sleeping badly make her hurt more? She started wondering if rest itself might somehow be connected to pain.

When her physiotherapist asked about her sleep routine, she hesitated. No one had ever linked her pain to her sleeping habits before. For the first time, she began to wonder if recovery did not just depend on movement, but also on how well she rested.



Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding how poor or irregular sleep can increase pain sensitivity.
- Recognizing that good sleep helps the body recover and manage pain more effectively.
- Learning everyday strategies to improve sleep quality and reduce flare-ups.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/DAXcbrImYts>

4.1. What is the role of sleep in pain?

Sleep plays an important role in your body's ability to recover from daily strain. Here is how it happens:

- During sleep you remove chemicals from your brain, helping it recovery and sending out signals to the rest of your body, which helps your body maintain daily functions.
- Poor sleep quality, like not getting enough sleep, or waking up and not being able to fall asleep again, can make pain feel more intense the next day.

Having a basic understanding of how you can improve your sleep can be helpful (for example, avoid intense stimuli before going to sleep such as watching videos on the cell phone or eating heavy meals). If the problem is more important and you have a sleep disorder, Cognitive behavioural therapy might be an effective treatment. Some people experience that pain becomes less and easier to control once they get regular sleep.

4.2. What can you do to improve your sleep?

Here are some simple strategies:

1. Going to bed and waking up at the same time helps regulate the body's internal clock. Look for triggers for your sleep disruption. For example, try not to stay in bed too long if you are unable to sleep. In such a case, get up, do something relaxing, and go back to bed.
2. While exercise is good for you and can help improve your sleep quality, you should avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime.
3. Alcohol, caffeine, and TV or screens before bedtime, can disturb your sleep and make it less effective. For example, blue light from screens can mess with melatonin, a chemical that tells your body when to sleep and wake up. Avoiding them at least two hours before bedtime can be helpful.
4. Try slow nasal breathing exercises, meditation, a warm bath or shower, or gentle stretching 30-60 minutes before bedtime, and see if that helps you fall asleep more easily.



Takeaway messages:

Lack of sleep and poor sleep quality can make pain worse.

By taking daily steps to improve them, your pain and general wellbeing may improve.